
To: Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 26 March 2026

Subject: Best Start in Life Strategy and Area Action Plan, and the Best Start Family Hubs

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To update the Scrutiny Board on Coventry’s current Early Years position and the implementation of the Best Start in Life (BSiL) Strategy and Local Area Plan (2026–2029).
- 1.2 To set out Coventry’s statutory Good Level of Development (GLD) targets and our approach to delivery through Best Start Family Hubs and partners.
- 1.3 To confirm the proposed approach to governance, workforce, and monitoring.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
 - 1) Note progress to date on the BSiL Strategy and Local Area Plan.
 - 2) Endorse the delivery approach and the proposed governance and monitoring arrangements.
 - 3) Support continued integrated work with a range of partners, Education and Children’s services, Family Hubs, SEND services, schools, and early years providers to accelerate improvement in GLD, especially for disadvantaged children.

3 Executive Summary

- 3.1 Nationally, all local authorities must publish a Best Start in Life Local Area Plan by April 2026, focusing on:
 - Best support for families.
 - Accessible early years provision.
 - High-quality early education (0–5), including Reception.
- 3.2 Coventry’s local response, ‘**Bold Start, Bright Futures**’ (2026–2029) is being co-produced with partners for publication by April 2026. The vision is that every child is safe, healthy, curious, confident, and ready to thrive by age five.

- 3.3 Coventry’s statutory targets by 2028 are to raise:
- Overall GLD from 65.3% to 72.3% (≈ 300 more children).
 - Disadvantaged GLD from 50.5% to 58.3% (≈ 57 more children).
- 3.4 Coventry has a strong early years system (Family Hubs; parenting support; Birth-5 SEND; Quality Improvement & Safeguarding; Business, Sufficiency and Funding support or nearly 300 providers, 174 of whom are funded).
- 3.5 Continuing challenges exist in improving outcomes including communication, language, and literacy, the GLD gap for disadvantaged children, and ward-level variation.
- 3.6 The national BSiL programme will invest £6.1m (2026–2029), prioritising workforce and delivery capacity across Family Hubs and partners.

4 National Context and Local Strategy

- 4.1 The Best Start for Life Strategy 2025 (BSiL) expects accessible, high-quality, and joined-up support from pregnancy to age five. BSiL positions early years as a whole-system responsibility, emphasising equity for all and earlier help for all, as well as targeting additional help to those most in need.
- 4.2 Coventry’s **Bold Start, Bright Futures Strategy** and **Local Area Plan**, replaces the previous Early Years Strategy (2025–2028) and builds on the Start for Life programme (2023–2026) which included ‘The first 1,001 days’, Family Hubs delivery, Home Learning Environment (HLE), Parenting, SEND, and Speech, Language and Communication support.
- 4.3 The new plan is data-led, equity-focused and evidence-based, with a strong focus on parental engagement as children’s first and enduring educators. It will be updated regularly in response to need and progress.

5 Coventry’s Current Position (GLD)

5.1 Headline position (SN – Statistical Neighbour)

Indicator	Coventry 2025	National 2025	SN 2025	Change (2024–2025)	Gap to National	Gap to SN
GLD	65.3%	68.3%	65.3%	+1.9 pp	-3.0 pp	0.0 pp
C&L	75.6%	79.6%	75.8%	+0.5 pp	-4.0 pp	-0.2 pp

- 5.2 In 2024–2025, **4,154** children were in Reception classes across Coventry. Of these, **2,701 achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD)**, giving the city an overall rate of **65.2%**. This represents a continued improvement from the previous year and shows Coventry beginning to recover from the dip seen in 2024.
- 5.3 Nationally, **68.3%** of children reached GLD, meaning Coventry is **3.3 percentage points below the England average**. While the gap remains, Coventry is now **closer to national outcomes and broadly in line with statistical neighbours**.
- 5.4 Communication and Language (C&L) outcomes have also improved, helping to narrow the gap slightly. However, this area remains a key challenge, particularly for **disadvantaged children and white disadvantaged boys**, where early language difficulties continue to affect later literacy.

5.5 Overall, while Coventry is moving in the right direction, **disadvantaged children, especially white disadvantaged boys will remain priority groups** for continued improvement.

5.6 **Strengths to build on.**

5.7 Coventry outcomes in 2024/25 show relative strengths in mathematics, expressive arts, and understanding the world compared with statistical neighbours. This indicates effective early years practice in these areas, including mathematical talk and practical problem-solving.

5.8 SEND Support pupils made notable gains in 2025, suggesting that targeted intervention and inclusive practice in the early years are having a positive effect, even within small cohorts.

5.9 The progress and achievement of white disadvantaged boys should also be noted.

5.10 **Trends in GLD over time**

Group	GLD2022/ 2023	GLD 2023/ 2024	GLD2024/ 2025	1-Year Change
All Pupils	64.2%	63.3%	65.3%	+2.0 pp

5.11 The data shows that Coventry’s GLD rate for All Pupils dipped from 64.2% (2022/23) to 63.3% (2023/24) before rising again to 65.3% in 2024/25. This represents a +2.0-percentage point improvement over the last year, bringing outcomes back above pre dip levels. The one-year increase suggests the beginning of a positive recovery trend, likely reflecting improvements in early language, wellbeing and early education engagement following the pandemic related dip seen in 2023/24.

6 **Coventry’s Current delivery system**

6.1 **Family Hubs and Start for Life:** This programme provides joined-up support from conception to age five (health visiting, midwifery, Baby & Me, stay-and-play, parenting, HLE, finance/housing/wellbeing, digital portal).

6.2 **SEND support (Birth–5):** This service helps families navigate early identification, inclusion, and statutory SEND processes. SEND sessions are delivered within Family Hubs, with a new requirement for each hub to have a designated SEND practitioner.

6.3 Families and practitioners can access:

- The SEND Birth to Five Team
- Early assessments including EHCNAs/EHCPs
- SENDIASS, impartial advice to families of children with SEND aged 0–25.
- Early Support (Children’s Disability Team), available to families where a child has disability, complex health needs, or significant additional needs.

6.4 **Early Years Quality Improvement & Safeguarding:** This team provides workforce development, support guidance, and challenge for schools and early years providers. EYFS quality and safeguarding monitoring; LADO partnership; Home Learning Environment and speech and language programmes.

- 6.5 **Business, Sufficiency and Funding:** This service area manages sufficiency and place planning, market stability, extended free entitlement, recruitment, and Early Education Entitlements funding.
- 6.6 **Early Help:** This team provides personalised support relating to wellbeing, parenting, finance, housing, and relationships. Signposting and multi-agency intervention where additional needs are identified. Early Help teams work closely with early years, health, and community partners to intervene early and improve long-term outcomes.
- 6.7 **Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector:** Voluntary, Faith and Community Groups offering local activities, connection, and support (including 0–19 support).

7 **Headline achievements**

- 7.1 The Start for Life (S4L) programme focused on the first 1,001 days and was delivered from January 2023 to March 2026, securing notable achievements. The programme updates for July 2025 highlighted strong progress, growing engagement, and clear improvements in the support offered for families from pregnancy to age five.
- 7.2 **Reaching More Families:** Since January 2024, over 27,000 families have engaged with the Family Hub offer, either in hubs, online, or through community outreach. Registrations have risen rapidly, from 8,500 in mid-2024 to 31,000 by June 2025, showing growing trust and awareness across communities.
- 7.3 **High-Performing Programme:** All major workstreams have met or exceeded their targets, demonstrating strong delivery and improving outcomes for children and parents. Parenting support, perinatal mental health, early communication, and infant feeding initiatives are all showing sustained progress.
- 7.4 **Digital Support for Families:** The Coventry Families Portal is now a one-stop hub for information, SEND support, session bookings, and local advice. The portal has attracted 14,600 users, 26,600 sessions and 151,000 page views, with over 1,200 app installs since launch. Available 24/7, it gives families easier access to help when they need it.
- 7.5 **Improving Early Learning and Communication:**
 - 5,193 families have engaged with ‘50 Things to do before you’re five’ (apps, downloads, events, paper resources). 30.9% of users sharing postcodes live in the 20% most deprived LSOAs
 - Easypeasy: 2,750 registered families (18.6% of Coventry’s 0–5 population). 89% of families use the app weekly. 56% of active users are from the most disadvantaged areas (target: 55%)
 - Little Coventry Communicators: A three-tier speech and language training pathway to strengthen practitioner confidence and system-wide consistency. To date:
 - 308 practitioners trained in Tier 1 (57% of settings represented)
 - 98 trained in Tier 2 (27.6% of settings)
 - 84 trained across all tiers, now Communication Champions (23.1% of settings)

- 70 Health Visiting staff received WellComm refresher training
- Communication & Language GLD measure increased from 74.4% (2022) to 75.6% (2025)

- 7.6 **Better Support for Babies, Parents and Carers:** More parents are accessing perinatal mental health support, with strong increases in participation from Black, Asian, and disadvantaged communities. Online “Togetherness” parenting registrations surpassed the 1,000 target, showing strong digital engagement. Support for fathers and partners has expanded significantly, including new community-based sessions and targeted outreach through Fatherhood Solutions. Birth registration and antenatal programmes have been successfully brought into more Family Hubs, making services easier to access locally.
- 7.7 **A strong, connected local network:** The impact of the S4L programme was stronger links with health, early years, community partners, and schools to create a more joined-up and family-friendly system. Work aligns with Coventry’s Marmot City priorities, ensuring support is targeted where it can make the biggest difference.
- 7.8 **In Summary:** Coventry’s Family Hubs and Start for Life programme is delivering:
- More access to services
 - Better support for parents and carers
 - Stronger early development for babies and young children
 - Improved digital access and clearer routes to help.
 - Targeted support for communities who need it most.
- 7.9 This progress places Coventry in a strong position to continue improving school readiness, family wellbeing, and long-term outcomes for children across the city.

8 **Best Start in Life (2026–2029): How We Will Deliver**

- 8.1 The national Best Start for Life Strategy 2025 sets the expectation that all local areas strengthen early years services through accessible, high-quality and joined-up support for families from pregnancy to age five.
- 8.2 Government documents make clear that BSIL brings together health, early education, maternity, and community services to create a joined up early years system. This means health visiting, maternity pathways, infant feeding, immunisation access, early development advice, and baby/toddler health information are all part of the national BSIL offer. [Giving every child the best start in life - GOV.UK](#)
- 8.3 The plan for Coventry is built around three pillars:
- Best Support for Families – stronger early help, integrated health pathways, and improved parenting confidence.
 - Accessible Early Years Provision – reducing barriers, improving take-up and strengthening community connection.
 - High-Quality Early Education (0–5) – improving communication and language, inclusive practice and early years pedagogy across settings and schools, including in Reception classes in schools.

8.4 The Bold Start, Bright Futures Strategy includes our Local Area Plan. It is built around five commitments and strategic goals and linked the 3 Best Start in Life Pillars, and in alignment with the national strategy.

Bold Start, Bright Futures Overview		
Commitment	Strategic Goal	Best Start in Life Pillar
<p>1. Safe and Nurtured Children experience safe, stable, and nurturing relationships in homes, early years settings and communities. Safeguarding concerns are identified early and acted on through joined-up Families First relational approaches.</p>	Strengthen systems for early multi- agency support for families experiencing adversity, and barriers to support. Ensure all professionals create safe, nurturing environments where children are protected and able to thrive through timely checks and intervention.	Pillar 1: Best Support for Families
<p>2. Healthy and Thriving Children have positive physical and emotional health, supported by secure early relationships, responsive caregiving and timely access to maternity, health, and Families First pathways.</p>	Promote healthy early development through strengthening infant–caregiver relationships, improve access to integrated maternity, health visiting, and Families First pathways, and prevent concerns from escalating.	Pillar 1: Best Support for Families
<p>3. Included, Valued & Connected Children and families feel included and connected to early education, Family Hubs and community services, experiencing belonging regardless of culture, background or need.</p>	Improve equitable access and community connection by reducing barriers to early education, strengthening outreach through Family Hubs, and building belonging across all communities.	Pillar 2: Accessible Early Years Provision
<p>4. Supported Families, Strong Foundations Families receive timely support that strengthens resilience and wellbeing and reduces inequalities. Parents are equipped with the skills, confidence, and tools to support learning at home, helping children build strong early foundations and be ready for school.</p>	Provide an increased range of integrated family support that builds parental confidence, strengthens home learning, and ensures families receive the right help at the right time to create strong early foundations.	<p>Pillar 1: Best Support for Families</p> <p>Pillar 3: High- Quality Early Education (0–5)</p>
<p>5. Learning, Communicating & Developing Children develop strong early communication, language, social- emotional and cognitive skills through high- quality, inclusive early years practice that nurtures curiosity, builds confidence, and enables all children to thrive by age 5.</p>	Improve achievement by developing and embedding high- quality, evidence- based practice and inclusive first approaches across all Early Years settings, Family Hubs, Health Visiting, and Community services to narrow the persistent achievement gaps to national outcomes.	Pillar 3: High- Quality Early Education (0–5)

8.5 **Programmes and offers:** A range of evidence-based programmes will support improved outcomes. Some are already in place and others will be developed over the next three years.

- Home Learning Environment (HLE) – evidence-based activity across hubs, libraries, and settings; coordinated by HLE Co-ordinator and Teaching Adviser; overseen by Senior Adviser (Birth–5); new BSiL Delivery Lead from 2026.
- Parenting support: A hybrid delivery approach including, Antenatal Nurture, SEND Nurture, Five to Thrive Baby, Parenting Puzzle, Living with Confidence, Talking Teens, Togetherness Online/Solihull.

- Learning and Development offers: Utilising a universal and targeted approach. The offer will include: 50 things to do before five, Chat, Play, Read, Stay Together, Play Together, PEEP and REAL. These are evidence-based programmes selected by the DfE with a focus on reinforcing family's confidence and skills in supporting playing and learning at home.
- Workforce Development: Universal and targeted support based on ward level GLD, deprivation and health data for schools and early years providers.
- Strengthened SEND offers to support earlier identification and provide additional support to families. This includes a new offer of a specialist SEND practitioner in every Family Hub
- Expansion of the Family Hub approaches developed across the voluntary, community and Faith based sector
- Health Services will continue to develop work previously initiated in relation to

<p>Healthy Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health visiting • Maternity pathways • Infant feeding support • Vaccination access • Early development checks • Integrated NHS advice 	<p>Perinatal mental health support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional and mental health support from conception to age 2 • Support for mothers, birthing people, fathers and partners • Parent infant relationship interventions • Better access for Black, Asian, deprived and higher risk groups
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8.6 Targets and measures: Statutory GLD targets for 2028: The Department for Education has set new national expectations for the Good Level of Development (GLD) that every local authority must achieve by the end of the 2027/28 academic year.

8.6.1 Overall GLD Target

Coventry must **increase GLD by 9 percentage points** from its 2023/24 level. This means Coventry must rise from **63.3% to 72.3%** by 2028. This target is designed to ensure every area contributes to a national ambition of around **75% of children achieving GLD**.

8.6.2 Minimum Standard for All Local Areas

Every area must achieve **at least 70% GLD** by 2028, even if their 9-point increase would take them below this level. Coventry's target (72.3%) already exceeds this minimum threshold.

8.6.3 Target for Children Eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)

Nationally, FSM children have much lower GLD outcomes (51.5% in 2023/24 compared with 72% for non-FSM). To close this gap, Coventry must ensure that GLD for FSM pupils increases by **at least the same amount** as the overall GLD improvement. Therefore, Coventry's FSM target must rise from **50.5% to at least 58.3%** by 2027/2028.

8.7 **Addressing Wider Inequalities:** Some groups, such as children with SEND, EAL learners, White disadvantaged boys, and those living in deprivation are statistically less likely to achieve GLD. The DfE expects local areas to show how their Best Start in Life Local Area Plan will:

- Narrow these gaps.
- Target interventions where they are needed most.
- Improve outcomes for all groups by 2028.

8.8 **Summary of What Coventry Must Achieve:** By the end of the 2027/28 academic year, Coventry must demonstrate:

Area	Coventry’s Required Improvement by 2028
Overall GLD	Increase from 63.3% → 72.3%
FSM GLD	Increase from 50.5% → 58.3%
All Other Groups	Evidence that gaps are narrowing and targeted work is in place

8.9 To reach our overall GLD target of 72.3% by 2028, based on the 2024/25 reception population, an additional 300 children would need to reach GLD.

8.10 To reach our free school meals GLD target of 58% by 2028, an additional 57 children eligible for free school meals would need to reach GLD.

8.11 This represents a significant uplift in early years outcomes and is central to our wider strategy of ensuring that every child in Coventry has the best possible start in life.

9 Investment, Workforce Development and Branding

9.1 Coventry will receive investment of £6.1m (2026 – 2029) from the DfE and DHSC for the next three years to mature and further develop its Best Start Family hubs and ensure delivery of the Healthy Babies Programme.

9.2 This funding will be instrumental in ensuring all children have the Best Start in Life and support improved achievement of the GLD targets for all children, including those who are most disadvantaged.

9.3 Planned spend: staffing profile and programme delivery. Much of the budget will be spent on staffing, both current staffing (16.42 wte posts) and new fixed term posts (18 wte) to meet the requirements of the programme and embed the work that has been developed in the first 4 years of the programme into the offer.

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	22%	£516,000	£421,900	£433,300
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - capital	5%	£103,200	£105,200	£107,300
Parenting support	19%	£370,100	£374,800	£391,200
Home learning environment support	14%	£279,400	£282,800	£295,300
Perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships	26%	£526,800	£526,800	£526,800
Infant feeding support	13%	£258,700	£258,700	£258,700
Healthy babies offers and parent and carer panels	1%	£26,600	£26,600	£26,600
Total		£2,080,800	£1,996,900	£2,039,200

9.4 Workforce investment is prioritised for BSiL Strategic Delivery Lead, additional Early Years, and parenting practitioners. Additional funding will be allocated by the DfE for implementation of early years SEND specialists in each Family Hub.

9.5 Branding: All eight hubs to be renamed Coventry Best Start in Life Family Hubs with national branding, and the expectation is that all services operating within the Family hub offer will use the new national branding alongside their local comms. (Appendix 2 – Branding requirements)

10 Governance, Risks and Next Steps

10.1 **Governance:** BSiL delivery will be governed through existing Children & Education and Health partnership structures, with clear lines to Family Hubs, SEND, schools, and Public Health. A request will be made to establish a clear governance accountability to the Health and Well Being Board.

10.2 Risks and mitigations:

Risk	Potential Impact	Required Action
Workforce capacity & retention	Limits quality & scale of delivery	Offer a range of training options. Planned support for the sector related to recruitment
High SEND demand	Pressure on inclusion pathways	Earlier ID and scaling of universal support offering new posts and future integration of SEND services in early years including Early Support Team (CDT, Children services) and Early years SEND (Education)
Variable take-up of funded childcare	Gaps in GLD & equity	Targeted outreach and comms strategy
Data fragmentation	Limits visibility of need	Shared LA-wide data integration as a shared priority
Mis-aligned priorities	Limits delivery of priorities	Ensure commissioning meets the requirements of the BSiL strategy document

11 Equality & Health Inequalities

11.1 Equality Impact Assessment and Inequalities Impact Assessment is underway; this paper references poverty, SEND, and gender gaps.

12 Next steps

12.1 Finalise and publish Bold Start, Bright Futures (March 2026); mobilise workforce; deliver Local Area Plan; report progress to Scrutiny and Cabinet.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – 2024/25 EYFSP GLD Trends over time: groups

Appendix 2 – Branding requirements for the new Best Start Family hub offer.

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Appendix 1. 2024 to 2025 EYFSP: Trends over time

Trends Over Time (2023–2025)

Group	GLD 2023	GLD 2024	GLD 2025	2-Year Change	Comment
All Pupils	64.2%	63.4%	65.3%	+1.1 pp	Upward rebound after 2024 dip
Disadvantaged	49.8%	49.6%	50.1%	+0.3 pp	Upward rebound after 2024 dip
EAL	58.9%	59.5%	59.7%	+0.8 pp	Small year on year growth in GLD
SEN Support	23.4%	21.5%	27.0%	+3.6 pp	Robust growth in 2025
Girls	71.9%	71.4%	72.5%	+0.6 pp	Holding steady at prominent levels
Boys	56.5%	55.8%	58.3%	+1.8 pp	Faster progress, but still behind girls

Appendix 2 Branding Requirements in the Best Start Family Hubs & Healthy Babies Guidance

The 2026 guidance sets out **specific, mandatory expectations** for how local authorities must brand and present their Best Start Family Hubs.

1. national branding and naming conventions

The guidance states that local authorities must use the **required branding and naming conventions** provided by the Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC). This is listed as a formal part of the guidance offer. **This means:**

- Hubs must use the **national name**: *Best Start Family Hub*.
- Local authorities cannot create alternative hub names or unique visual identities that replace national identity.
- Local variations are allowed only *within* the national standard (e.g., location tags, sub-branding services).

2. All physical hubs must be clearly identifiable as Best Start Family Hubs

Because the guidance requires hubs to be **physical spaces** offering a recognisable “one-stop shop” model, every hub must:

- Display the approved **Best Start Family Hub signage**.
- Use the national branding across:
 - buildings
 - printed materials
 - digital channels
 - outreach communications

The guidance states hubs must be *physical spaces* delivering core services and accessible to families, supporting consistent identification.

3. Branding must support a consistent national identity

The 2026 guidance emphasises the need for consistency across all local authorities so that families recognise Family Hubs wherever they are in the country. Branding and naming conventions are part of the national framework for ensuring consistent delivery across all LAs. **We must ensure:**

- Use of the correct **logo, colour schemes, templates, and wording** (provided by DfE/DHSC).
- No divergence into local logos could cause confusion.

4. Branding must reflect the programme’s principles: universal, accessible, inclusive

The guidance describes hubs as “*welcoming, inclusive environments where every family feels valued,*” which influences branding requirements. Branding must align with the expectations for the hubs to be:

- Welcoming
- universal
- inclusive of all families
- easy for families to identify and navigate.

5. Branding must align with local Best Start Plans and Neighbourhood Health Plans

Because the programme links hub identity to integrated health and early years systems, branding must be coherent across:

- Family Hubs
- Neighbourhood Health Plans
- Local Best Start strategies