
To: Health and Wellbeing Board

Date: June 2026

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

1 Purpose of the Note

1.1 To provide the Health and Wellbeing Board an overview of Coventry's 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 propose the approach to governance, workforce, and monitoring, including oversight by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Health and Wellbeing Board are recommended to

1) Agree to take on the governance of Best Start in Life, overseeing the BSiL Strategic Partnership.

2) Endorse the integrated delivery approach and the proposed governance and monitoring arrangements.

3) Note progress to date on the BSiL Strategy and Local Area Plan.

4) Enable the appropriate and proportionate sharing of information between agencies related to service activity and young children's outcomes to identify earlier those children at risk of not being ready for school.

5) Encourage and enable commissioned services to act responsively and flexibly to align with the new requirements of the national and local Best Start strategies and tailor their services to meet the needs of children at risk of not being school ready and achieving GLD, as well as supporting all children through the universal pathways.

3 Information/Background

3.1 Nationally, all local authorities were required to 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) has been co-produced with partners and was published online in April 2026, and officially launched on 22nd June, 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 rise:

- Overall GLD from 65.3% to 72.3% (\approx 300 more children).
- Disadvantaged GLD from 50.5% to 58.3% (\approx 57 more children).

3.4 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. Nationally, all local authorities were required to 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.

3.4 Coventry has a strong early year's system including Best Start Family Hubs; parenting support; Birth-5 SEND; Quality Improvement & Safeguarding; Business, Sufficiency and Funding support of nearly 300 early years providers. However continuing challenges exist in improving outcomes including communication, language, and literacy, the GLD gap for disadvantaged children, and ward-level variation.

3.5 The national BSiL programme will invest £6.1m to Coventry (2026–2029), prioritising workforce and delivery capacity across Best Start Family Hubs and partners.

3.6 This also includes the Healthy Babies Programme which focuses on children and their families and requires the ongoing integration of services to deliver a connected offer for all families in the first 1001 days. See Appendix 2 re Coventry's current delivery system through the Best Start Family Hubs and headline achievements.

3.7 The vision is that every child is safe, healthy, curious, confident, and ready to thrive by age five. 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. This has been coproduced with partners and was published online in April 2026 and officially launched on 22nd June 2026.

3.8 Coventry’s statutory targets by 2028 are:

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

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.

3.9 Coventry has a strong early year’s 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.

3.10 However continuing challenges exist in improving outcomes including communication, language, and literacy, the GLD gap for disadvantaged children, and ward-level variation. – see Appendix 1 for Coventry’s current position and data with analysis.

3.11 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. The government makes it clear the expectation 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, 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](#) [Giving Every Child The Best Start In Life | Local Government Association](#)

The local area plan for Coventry is built around the 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.

3.12 Coventry’s The Bold Start; Bright Futures Strategy and the associated Local Area Plan is built around five commitments and strategic goals, linked to the 3 Best Start in Life Pillars, aligning to 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 <i>Children have positive physical and emotional health, supported by secure early relationships, responsive caregiving and timely access to maternity, health, and Families First pathways.</i></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.	Pillar 1: Best Support for Families Pillar 3: High-Quality Early Education (0–5)
<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)

4 How this work contributes to the delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy

- 4.1 The Best Start in Life Strategy, and the work of the Best Start Family Hubs are a key contributor to taking action on the wider determinants of health including improving the physical activity of young children, and their families, tackling childhood obesity, providing services for those with issues relating to alcohol and substance misuse and sexual health services.
- 4.2 The Best Start Family Hubs are a key enabler to deliver of integrated health and care system, with a wide range of partners working together to improve health outcomes and tackle healthcare inequalities.
- 4.3 Family hubs are identified in the strategy regarding taking action on the places and communities we live in. They are making a significant contribution to meeting the strategic ambitions of children and young people fulfilling their potential, and people live in connected, safe and sustainable communities. They also provide places in the community to combat loneliness and social isolation, support young people's mental health and wellbeing and are pioneering a range of ways of working differently with communities.

5 How this work aligns to Coventry's Marmot approach

- 5.1 Giving every child the best start in life is the first of Coventry's Marmot principles with the priorities of
 - Reducing inequalities in the early development of physical and emotional health, cognitive, linguistic, and social skills.
 - Working with families to support language development, including children with EAL (English as an Additional Language).
 - Maximising the take up of 2, 3, and 4-year-old funded places.
 - Ensuring high-quality maternity services, parenting programmes, childcare and early years' provision to meet need across the social gradient including support for families from ethnic minority backgrounds.
 - Building the resilience and well-being of young children across the social gradient.
- 5.2 The Best Start in Life Strategy and associate local area action plan is the means to ensure these priorities are delivered through
 - Integrated universal, targeted and specialist support to families from the antenatal period up to adolescence across the social gradient.
 - Targeted high-quality family learning interventions to maximise children's learning in the home environment for families across the social gradient.
 - Interventions at the earliest opportunity for the multiple and complex problems families face.
 - Early years provision to maximise children's learning, development, and school readiness.
 - General information and advice to parents and carers to support positive parenting and nurturing home environments.

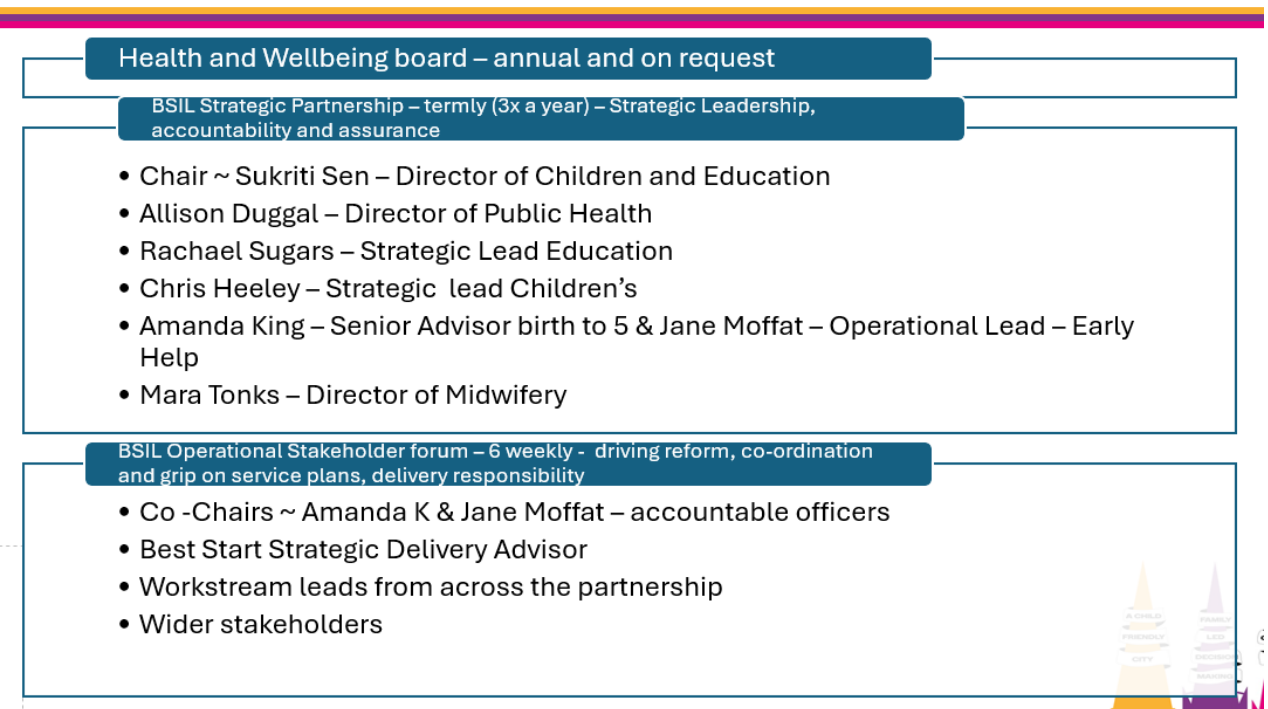
- Programmes to help ensure that babies and toddlers stay safe in and around the home to reduce the number of unintentional injuries.

5.3 This strategy also contributes to the Marmot principle and priority of enabling all children, young people, and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives

6 Governance

6.1 A request is made to establish a clear governance accountability to the Health and Well Being Board, overseeing the BSIL Strategic Partnership which will be co-chaired by the Director of Children and Education Services and the Director of Public Health.

Best Start in Life Strategy Governance – 26-29



6.2 Health and Wellbeing Board, is the most appropriate and effective governance body, as it:

- Provides statutory leadership and legitimacy
- Aligns BSIL with wider health and wellbeing priorities
- Enables whole-system partnership working
- Prioritises prevention, early intervention, and inequalities
- Strengthens accountability and delivery

Positioning Best Start in Life under Health and Wellbeing Board governance will maximise strategic coherence, partnership ownership, and impact on outcomes for children and families.

6.3 The BSiL strategy is directly aligned with the priorities typically set out in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, including:

- Improving early childhood outcomes
- Reducing inequalities in maternal and infant health
- Supporting healthy development and family resilience

Placing governance within the Health and Wellbeing Board would ensure:

- Clear line of sight between BSiL priorities and wider system objectives
- Consistency in outcomes, performance measures, and reporting
- Avoidance of duplication across partnership strategies

6.4 Whole-System Partnership Governance

Effective BSiL delivery requires coordinated action across:

- NHS organisations (ICB, providers, maternity services)
- Local authority services (public health, early help, children's services)
- Voluntary and community sector partners

The HWB is uniquely positioned to convene and lead this whole-system partnership, by providing senior strategic leadership, cross-agency accountability and the forum for resolving system-wide barriers. This would ensure the BSiL action plan is not owned by a single service but is a shared system commitment.

6.5 Focus on Prevention and Early Intervention, addressing Health Inequalities

The HWB has a strong mandate to prioritise prevention and early intervention, which are central to BSiL. Early years investment delivers long-term benefits across health, education, and social care.

Governance through HWB would also:

- Strengthens the case for continued investment in early years
- Embeds preventative approaches across the wider system
- Ensures BSiL remains a strategic priority in the context of competing demands
- Ensure BSiL and BSFH specifically target disparities in infant mortality, parental health outcomes, as well as child development and school readiness

10.6. Integration with Integrated Care System (ICS) Priorities

The BSiL agenda aligns strongly with NHS and ICS priorities, including:

- Start for Life and Family Hubs programmes
- Prevention and population health management
- Reducing demand on acute services

The HWB would provide the formal interface between local authority and NHS partners, enabling:

- Strategic alignment with ICS plans
- Integrated commissioning and delivery
- Better use of pooled or aligned resources

Appendices

Appendix 1: Coventry's Current Position (GLD)

Appendix 2: Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme and achievements to date

Appendix 3: Ways we will deliver the BSIL strategy across the partnership

Authors and Contacts:

Amanda King – Senior Adviser (0–5) – Joint Accountable Officer for BSIL

Jane Moffat – Operational Lead Early Help – Joint Accountable Officer for BSIL

Tessa Hewitt – Consultant Public Health - Inequalities and Life Chances

Contact: Amanda.King@coventry.gov.uk | Jane.Moffat@coventry.gov.uk
Tessa.Hewitt@coventry.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Coventry's Current Position (GLD)

The new BSIL local area action 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.

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

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 to reflect improvements in early language, wellbeing and early education engagement following the pandemic related dip seen in 2023/24.

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

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.

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**.

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.

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

Strengths to build on.

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.

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.

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

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

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 to reflect improvements in early language, wellbeing and early education engagement following the pandemic related dip seen in 2023/24.

Appendix 2: Coventry's Current delivery system and headline achievements

Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme

The Healthy Babies Programme (26–29) is a targeted early intervention initiative aimed at improving outcomes for expectant parents and infants during pregnancy and the early weeks of life. It focuses on prevention, health promotion, and reducing inequalities, particularly among families identified as having additional vulnerabilities.

The programme seeks to:

- Improve maternal health and wellbeing during pregnancy
- Promote healthy behaviours (e.g. smoking cessation, nutrition, breastfeeding)
- Strengthen early attachment and parent–infant relationships
- Reduce risks to infant health and development
- Ensure early identification and support for families with additional needs

Key Components of the offer should include

- Enhanced antenatal support: Structured contact around 26–29 weeks to assess needs and provide tailored guidance
- Health promotion: Advice on nutrition, substance use, infant feeding, and safe sleep
- Preparation for parenthood: Practical and emotional preparation for birth and early care
- Early relationship building: Support to strengthen bonding and attachment
- Multi-agency working: Coordination across midwifery, health visiting, and wider early help services

The Best Start Family Hub and Healthy Babies programme provides joined-up support from conception to age five including health visiting, midwifery, Baby & Me, stay-and-play, parenting, HLE, finance, housing, wellbeing, digital portal.

It is underpinned by strong, collaborative partnership working across the wider family support system, including key health partners such as the Public Health-commissioned SWFT Family Health and Lifestyles Service, which includes health visiting, Family Nurse Partnership for parents aged 19 and under, Infant feeding, Stop Smoking in Pregnancy and MAMTA supporting mothers from ethnic minorities. It also includes close partnership working with UHCW Midwifery Services, Social Prescribers, and CWPT Mental Health Services, alongside a broad network of commissioned, voluntary, and community sector organisations. The programme aligns closely with Public Health priorities, including the development of the Coventry Child Poverty Strategy and targeted efforts to reduce infant mortality.

This programme is also supported by the work in Children's and Education Services and closely aligns to the SEND reforms including

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.

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.

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.

Business, Sufficiency and Funding: This service area manages sufficiency and place planning, market stability, extended free entitlement, recruitment, and Early Education Entitlements funding.

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.

Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector Voluntary, Faith and Community Groups offering local activities, connection, and support (including 0–19 support).

Expected outcomes of the programme include:

- Improved birth outcomes and infant health
- Increased breastfeeding initiation and continuation
- Reduced smoking in pregnancy
- Stronger parental confidence and attachment
- Earlier identification and support for vulnerable families

Achievements to date include

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.

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.

Examples of expected outcomes from the Health Visiting and Infant feeding service, commissioned by Public Health, are outlined below including current performance.

Area of activity	24/25 Performance	25/26 Performance (April – Dec)
6-8 week check – improved birth outcomes and infant health	83%	85%
Increased breastfeeding initiation Continuation	61%	63%
Stop smoking in pregnancy		57%
% of 2-2.5 year checks under on time	74%	74%

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.

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)

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.

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.

Appendix 3: Ways we will deliver the BSIL strategy across the partnership

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 sectors
- **Health Services** will continue to develop work previously initiated in relation to

<p style="text-align: center;">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 style="text-align: center;">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
--	---