

READING HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

Date of Meeting	16 July 2026
Title	Best Start Family Hub and Best Start in Life Delivery Plan Update
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report author	Becky Bateman & Zoe Campbell
Job title	Head of Early Years and Childcare, Strategic Lead for Best Start in Life and Public Health Principal (Children)
Organisation	Reading Borough Council
Recommendations	1. Endorse the delivery model for Best Start Family Hubs and Best Start in Life programme 2. Note the proposed data reporting set

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Best Start Family Hubs play a crucial role in reducing inequalities by providing accessible, integrated support for children, young people, and families - particularly those facing disadvantage. By bringing together services such as early years education, health, parenting, and wider support in one place, they improve access and remove barriers linked to income, location, or awareness. This supports early intervention and helps ensure children have the foundations for healthy development and school readiness.

1.2 The Best Start Family Hubs and Start for Life (BSFH and BSIL) programme forms part of the national early years transformation agenda, with a focus on improving outcomes for children aged 0-5. Locally, the programme aims to increase the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) from 68% to 75% by 2028, while reducing inequalities for groups, including children with SEND, those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), and those with English as an Additional Language (EAL). The programme strengthens early identification and intervention and delivers integrated, accessible services through a Family Hub "single front door" approach.

1.3 The approach reflects the strong evidence base that early childhood - particularly the earliest years - has a significant influence on long-term health, wellbeing, and life chances. As such, the programme prioritises prevention, early help, and improving outcomes for families at the earliest stage.

1.4 This report provides a strategic overview of the BSFH and BSIL delivery model, and expected outcomes to improve early years development and reduce inequalities across Reading.

2. Policy Context

2.1) The programme aligns with the national early years transformation agenda, including the Department for Education Start for Life and Family Hubs programme. It also aligns with SEND and Families First reforms and supports the Neighbourhood Health Framework and local delivery priorities.

It contributes to improving Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes and reducing inequalities in Reading, particularly for:

- Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Children eligible for Free School Meals
- Children with English as an Additional Language

This reflects a shared system priority to improve outcomes in the early years through prevention, early intervention, and integrated working.

3. The Proposal

3.1 DfE funding is ring-fenced and used strategically to deliver an integrated early years system through four core delivery areas:

- Home Learning Environment (HLE)
- Parenting Support
- SEND & Early Identification
- System Integration & Family Hubs

The model is designed to strengthen early intervention, improve access to services, and ensure support is targeted effectively using local data and need.

3.2 Key enabling infrastructure includes:

- **Family Hubs Leadership** – to operationalise the delivery of the programme
- **Early Years Curriculum & Quality Leadership** for maintained schools sector – support curriculum quality and transition from Early years
- **Early Years Advisory Support to PVI Sector** support high quality curriculum delivery and transition to schools
- **Dedicated Programme and Project Leadership** – development of locality level partnership boards and joint planning meetings with roles drawn from each respective service and voluntary/community sector groups. Mapping existing services and identifying gaps data analysis of service need * *BSIL strategic lead could deliver this as alternative option*
- **Data Analyst** - embedded data, performance reporting and evaluation
- **Family Hub Navigators** to improve access, signposting, referral pathways
- **Strengthened Early Years Leadership Capacity** for HLE team and BSIP delivery to strengthen a cross-service, shared understanding of home learning, to broaden cohesive support for families.

3.3 Target outcomes include:

- Increase GLD to 75% by 2028
- Improve early language development
- Increase parenting programme engagement and completion
- Improve early SEND identification before age 4

3.4 Investment Profile

Area	Investment 26/27	Investment 27/28	Investment 28/29	Purpose
Home Learning Environment (HLE) (3-4 years)	£139,200	£141,000	£147,100	Early language & parent-child interaction

Parenting Support (3-4 years)	£104,400	£105,700	£110,400	Parenting confidence & behaviour
SEND & Early Identification (0-5 years)	£175,400	£280,600	£280,600	Early identification & inclusion
Programme funding	£345,100	£282,000	£289,000	System Integration / Family Hubs Access, workforce, data & leadership
Capital	£69,000	£70,000	£71,000	Capital modifications/improvements

Funding is ring-fenced and supports early intervention, workforce capability, service integration, and improved access through Family Hubs.

4. Priority Delivery Areas

These delivery areas reflect national programme requirements and are aligned to evidence-based approaches to improving early childhood outcomes, particularly through early intervention, strong family support, and integrated service delivery.

4.1 Home Learning Environment (HLE)

Focus on speech, language and communication (ELKLAN informed approach), with targeted support for disadvantaged families using local data.

Impact:

- Improved early development and communication and GLD
- Increased attainment of language milestones
- Increase school readiness and GLD

4.2 Parenting Support

Delivery of evidence-based parenting programmes for three- to four-year-olds alongside universal offers, supported by improved referral pathways and workforce training.

Impact:

- Increased parental confidence
- Improved child behaviour and attachment, self regulation
- Increase school readiness
- Greater engagement from priority groups

4.3 SEND & Early Identification

Shift from reactive to preventative model through:

- Best Start Inclusion Practitioners (BSIPs) x 4
- Experts at hand multi-disciplinary support (EP, SaLT, OT)
- Training for workforce and parents
- Peer support networks

Impact:

- Earlier identification (pre-age four)

- Reduced waiting times
- Improved outcomes for SEND children

4.4 System Integration & Family Hubs

Family Hubs act as the central delivery model enabling:

- Single front door access
- Improved multi-agency working
- Data-led targeting of support

Developments include:

- Locality-based partnership boards
- Co-location of services (health, SEND, early years)
- Expanded outreach through community and VCFS partnerships
- Integrated working with Families First to provide seamless support pathways

Impact:

- Increased service reach
- Improved family experience
- Reduced system fragmentation

5. Performance and Outcomes Framework

Please refer to the BSIL outcomes framework in appendix 3.

6. Value for Money

The programme contributes to:

- Reducing inequalities in health and early years outcomes
- Supporting children and families in the early years
- Promoting wellbeing through prevention and early intervention
- Improving long-term life chances
- It aligns particularly with priorities to support early years development and reduce differences in outcomes between groups.

7. Risks and Considerations

Key risks include:

- Delivery reliant on effective cross-agency integration
- Workforce capacity, staff resource and training sustainability
- Data system maturity and reporting capability
- Engagement of priority and seldom-heard groups
- Change of government direction

Mitigation focuses on strengthening governance, partnership working, and performance monitoring.

Options

- **Option 1 (Recommended):** Approve the full programme and funding model to enable system-wide integration and early intervention.
- **Option 2:** Deliver a reduced model focusing on selected priority areas – this would limit impact and reduce system change.
- **Option 3 (Do Nothing):** Do not proceed – this risks worsening early years outcomes and does not maximise available funding.

7.1 Contribution to Reading's Health and Wellbeing Strategic Aims

The programme contributes to:

- Reducing inequalities in health outcomes
- Supporting children and families in early years
- Promoting wellbeing through early intervention
- Improving life chances and long-term outcomes

The programme aligns particularly with helping children and families in early years and reducing differences in health outcomes between groups.

8. Environmental and Climate Implications

No significant environmental or climate implications have been identified.

The programme primarily relates to service delivery and integration rather than infrastructure changes.

9. Community Engagement

Engagement is delivered through:

- Locality partnership boards
- Voluntary and community sector organisations
- Co-design and feedback from families

10. Equality Implications

The programme targets disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and is expected to have a positive impact on reducing inequalities in access, experience, and outcomes. A full Equality Impact Assessment may be required.

11. Other Relevant Considerations

Key risks include workforce capacity, effective cross-agency integration, data system maturity, and engagement with priority groups. Mitigation will focus on governance, partnership working, and performance monitoring.

12. Legal Implications

To be confirmed in consultation with Legal Services prior to submission.

13. Financial Implications

The programme is funded through ring-fenced Department for Education funding allocated across delivery areas including Home Learning Environment, Parenting, SEND, and System Integration. Investment is focused on early intervention, workforce capability, and system integration to improve outcomes and deliver longer-term value by reducing future demand on services.

Grahame Craig, Finance Business Partner DSG and Education - has cleared these financial Implications.

14. Timetable for Implementation

Delivery will take place from **2026 to 2029**, with phased implementation, ongoing monitoring, and evaluation through programme governance arrangements.

15. Background Papers

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-family-hubs-and-healthy-babies-guidance-for-local-authorities>

Appendices

1. Governance Document
2. Best Start in Life Strategy
3. Proposed data set