

Best start Family hubs and Best start in Life – Governance Document (v1)

Reading Borough Council

May 2026

1. Purpose of this Document

This document sets out the governance framework for the implementation of the Best start in life strategy through the Best start Family hubs within Reading Borough Council's Education and Children's Services.

It defines the decision-making structures, roles and responsibilities, and project management arrangements that will ensure the programme is delivered effectively, transparently, and in alignment with the council's strategic priorities.

The document is iterative and will evolve as the programme progresses and as local deliverables are confirmed.

The Programme will be delivered within the wider context of national and local learning and findings. These governance arrangements ensure that the programme is delivered in a transparent, accountable and collaborative way across all partner agencies. Programme management will adopt an agile, waterfall style of management to be responsive to iterative learning and an emerging local and national context.

This Best start in Life programme transformation is being delivered within the wider context of national early years reforms which prioritise prevention, early intervention and integrated place-based support for families. These reforms emphasise improving outcomes in the critical early years, particularly from pregnancy to age two, through stronger partnership working and system wide accountability.

2. Programme Overview

The Best Start in Life programme is a strategic, system-wide transformation programme focused on improving outcomes for babies, young children and families, particularly during the critical first 1,001 days from conception to age two.

The programme brings together partners across health, local government, education and the voluntary and community sector to deliver integrated, prevention-focused services that support healthy child development, reduce inequalities and improve school readiness.

The programme aligns with national priorities including the Start for Life agenda and the development of Family Hubs, strengthening early intervention and ensuring families can access coordinated support at the earliest opportunity.

Key areas of focus include:

- Early child development and school readiness
- Parent-infant relationships and family wellbeing
- Speech, language and communication development
- Perinatal and infant mental health
- Reducing health and developmental inequalities
- Integrated early help and safeguarding support

Delivery is underpinned by strong multi-agency partnership working, data-informed decision making and a place-based approach to service integration.

The programme is outcomes-focused, aiming to improve children's life chances, enhance family resilience and ensure that all children have the best possible start in life.

3. Governance Structure

The programme will be governed through a three-tier structure to ensure both strategic oversight and operational delivery.

Level	Group	Purpose	Frequency
Strategic Oversight	Health and Wellbeing Board and One Reading partnership Board	Provides high-level direction and accountability; approves funding and key decisions	Two monthly
Operational Delivery	Best Start in Life Operational Board	Oversees day-to-day delivery, risks, and dependencies; ensures alignment across workstreams; monitors progress against plan.	Monthly
Programme Management	Project Meetings / Workstream Groups	Coordinate detailed actions, update progress, escalate issues.	Two Weekly

A visual representation of the governance hierarchy can be added once membership is confirmed.

4. Programme Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Sponsor

Role: Senior responsible owner for the programme.

Postholder: Executive Director of Children's Services

Responsibilities:

- Provides strategic leadership and ensures alignment with council priorities.
- Approves key decisions and resource allocations.
- Co-Chairs or delegates chairing of the Strategic Board.
- Resolves escalated issues beyond the control of the Strategic Lead.
- Champions the programme across partner agencies.
- Provides regular updates to Corporate Management Teams

4.2 Partner Agency Sponsorship

Role: Act as leads for their organisations, responsible for engagement, information-sharing, and funding / resource commitments.

Responsibilities:

- Represent their agency at Board or Operational level.
- Ensure their organisation understands and supports BSFH and BSIL objectives.
- Proactively supports the identification of risks and impediments to progress and proactively seek solutions/mitigations
- Coordinate internal decision-making and communication.
- Confirm contribution to funding and workforce (where applicable).

4.3 Strategic Lead

Role: Senior operational lead responsible for overseeing delivery and embedding of the FSM within practice.

Likely postholder: Head of Early years and Childcare & Best start in Life Strategic Lead

Responsibilities:

- Leads on local design and implementation of BSIL.
- Chairs the BSIL Operational Board.
- Provides direction to delivery leads.
- Ensures staff and partner engagement.
- Signs off deliverables prior to sponsor approval.

4.4 Programme Manager

Role: Responsible for coordinating all aspects of project delivery, planning, monitoring and reporting. (* This post could be undertaken by Head of Early years and Childcare and Strategic lead for BSIL with PMO support)

Responsibilities:

- Develops and maintains the project plan, governance documentation and risk/issue logs.
- Facilitates governance meetings and ensures timely reporting.

- Coordinates BSIL Board and tracks progress against milestones.
- Produces highlight reports and dashboards for boards.
- Supports the Strategic Lead in stakeholder engagement.
- Ensures adherence to council project management standards and methodologies.
- Drives agile working practices (sprints, iterative updates, regular feedback loops).

4.5 Delivery leads

Role: Subject matter experts responsible for delivering agreed deliverables within the BSIL strategy

Delivery leads:

- Perinatal and early health improvement -0-19 lead BHFT
- Neurodivergence and SEND early identification – EY SEND TM
- Home learning and early language development – EY TM
- Early years quality and workforce development – EY TM/ Strategic lead for school effectiveness
- Family hubs and place based early help – Family hubs TM
- Public health nursing and integrated partnerships – Public Health Principal
- Outcomes, insight and evaluation – Delivery leads inform Data analyst via BSIL Board

Delivery leads will sit on the Operational BSFH and BSIL Board

Responsibilities:

- Define scope, deliverables and timelines for their area.
- Coordinate input from partners and internal teams.
- Report progress and risks to the Programme Manager.
- Ensure dependencies are identified and managed.
- Escalate delays or decisions required to the Operational Board.

5. Decision-Making & Escalation

Level	Decisions Made	Escalation Route
Delivery leads	Operational activities, task prioritisation	To Programme Manager/Strategic Lead
Operational Board	Milestones, dependencies, operational risks	To Strategic Board
Strategic Board	Strategic direction, impact and effectiveness, partnership resolution, integrated commissioning and sustainable funding	Integrated Care Board /Reading Borough Council Adult Social Care, Education & Children's Services Committee

6. Reporting & Assurance

- **Highlight Reports:** Monthly by the Programme Manager to the Stakeholders.
- **Performance Dashboard:** Regular oversight of key metrics, tracking progress to Strategic Board.
- **Risk / Issue Logs:** Maintained live by Programme Manager and reviewed regularly.
- **Change and Decision Log:** Used to track new requests, deliverable changes or delays.

7. Meetings & Frequency

Meeting	Chair	Frequency	Purpose
Strategic Board	Sponsor / Lead member for public health/Director for public health	Two Monthly	Strategic oversight, approvals, alignment
Operational Board	Strategic Lead	Monthly	Delivery oversight, dependencies, risks
Project Meeting / Workstream Leads	Programme Manager	Two Weekly	Progress updates, blockers, next sprint
Partner Check-ins	Programme Manager / Strategic Lead	As required	Clarify roles, funding, expectations

8. Documentation & Controls

Document	Owner	Description
Governance Document	Programme Manager	Defines structure, roles, and controls (this document).
Project Plan	Programme Manager	Milestones, workstreams, deliverables.
Partnership Agreement	Strategic Lead	A formal agreement between RBC and partner agencies
Highlight Report	PM	Bi-weekly summary of progress, issues, and next steps.
Risk & Issues Log	PM	Tracks risks and mitigations.
Change Log & Decision Log	PM	Captures scope or timeline changes.

9. Communication & Engagement

- Internal staff updates (through existing communications channels).
- Partner engagement events

- Regular feedback loops between PM, workstream leads, and practice teams.
- Public communications as agreed by Comms workstream and approved by Strategic Board.

10. Review & Updates

This document will be reviewed and updated at key milestones or when significant structural or partnership changes occur.

Version control will be maintained, and all updates will be approved by the Project Sponsor.

Review and updates will be maximised to enable a culture of continual learning and improvement.

Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Summary of Changes
1.0	May 2026	Becky Bateman -Strategic Lead for BSIL	Initial draft for discussion with DMT