

Brighton & Hove City Council

Cabinet

Agenda Item 150

Subject: Best Start in Life Strategic Plan 2026-2029

Date of meeting: Thursday, 19 March 2026

Report of: Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Youth Services

Lead Officer: Corporate Director for Families, Children and Wellbeing

Contact Officer: Joanne Templeman

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Ward(s) affected: All

Key Decision: Yes

Reason(s) Key: Is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral divisions (wards).

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report details the draft Best Start in Life Strategic Plan 2026-2029 (Appendix 1). The final plan is to be published on 31st March 2026 in line with DfE requirements.
- 1.2 Brighton and Hove City Council has provisionally been allocated £1,978,700 grant funding from the DfE for the period 2026–2029. The Best Start in Life Strategic plan is a funding requirement to support with Best Start in Life programme expectations, achievement of statutory targets for good level of development at the end of reception year and use of approved evidence-based interventions (EBIs).
- 1.3 The Best Start in Life Strategic Plan directly supports the Council Plan mission of delivering A Better Brighton & Hove for All by improving early years outcomes, reducing inequalities, and ensuring families can access integrated, evidence-based support. Through strengthened Best Start Family Hubs and a focus on the Good Level of Development, the plan contributes to the Council's ambition for a fairer, more inclusive city where all children can thrive.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet agrees the Best Start in Life Strategic Plan 2026-2029 (Appendix 1) and for this to be published on 31st March 2026 and authorises the Corporate Director - Families, Children and Wellbeing to make any

necessary minor non-material text and illustrative alterations prior to its publication.

3. Context and background information

3.1 Best Start is the national blueprint for expansion of the community element of the existing DfE Family Hubs Model Framework & Service Expectations, embedding a sustainable community-based offer for families by strengthening existing universal, preventative and targeted support.

3.2 Locally, the strategic commitment, investment and developments undertaken following the Early Help Review and subsequent Family Hubs Transformation programme plus self-assessments, have ensured a solid foundation for Brighton & Hove to implement Best Start in Life and expand the Family Hubs community offer in line with government policy.

3.3 The Best Start in Life programme aims to:

- **Support families with children aged 0-19:** Provide integrated, community-based services through Family Hubs, improve health and maternity care, and offer digital parenting resources.
- **Reduce inequalities & boost outcomes:** Ensure 75% of five-year-olds nationally achieve a Good Level of Development by 2028. For Brighton & Hove, the statutory targets are 78.6% overall GLD and 58.7% for disadvantaged children by 2027/28.
- **Expand childcare access:** Deliver 30 hours of funded childcare from nine months old, increase nursery places, and support children with SEND.
- **Improve early education quality:** Recruit and retain skilled early years teachers, strengthen Ofsted oversight, and promote evidence-based practice.

3.4 The plan aims to support delivery and track progress toward achievement of the statutory GLD targets, and we will introduce a Best Start dashboard with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as part of the programme assurance metrics. These KPIs will focus on:

- **Reach and Engagement:** The number of families supported to begin evidence-based interventions both in person and online, and completion rates.
- **Coverage:** The extent specific cohorts are reached, including disadvantaged families and those with historically lower levels of engagement, subject to data availability.
- **Impact:** Evidence of change, such as the number of parents reporting improvements in parenting confidence, child development outcomes, or other relevant measures.

3.5 The Best Start in Life Plan sets out how Brighton & Hove will ensure every baby and young child grows up healthy, happy and ready to learn, with parents able to access trusted, joined-up support from pregnancy to starting school. The plan brings together Family Hubs, health services, early

education, childcare, SEND services, schools, libraries and the voluntary sector to create a coherent citywide offer.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 Brighton & Hove has statutory targets: 78.6% of all children and 58.7% of disadvantaged children reaching a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of reception year by 2028. The plan sets out how Brighton & Hove will deliver Best Start Services to meet this target.
- 4.2 Prior to beginning the development of the strategic plan there was a year long review and gap analysis through the multi agency Best Start in Life strategy group (formerly Start for Life strategy group) and family voice engagement sessions which have informed the plan alongside the data shown within the plan (appendix 1). The review and engagement with families helped shape the 4 key priority areas and cross cutting themes.
- 4.3 Through the review and gap analysis it was identified that a focus was needed on early language and communication which has been addressed through priority 2. Health and Wellbeing will continue to be a focus through priority 4 and aligns with the council's Starting Well plan and the neighbourhood health plans.
- 4.4 Family feedback identified the need for easily accessible information and support that meets their needs and is a theme throughout the plan. Priority 4 focuses on helping families access information and support and through all priorities the plan aims to provide high quality service when and where families need them with a focus on those facing disadvantage or with SEND.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 Throughout the family hubs transformation there has been ongoing engagement with families, communities and partners.
- 5.2 There have been specific Best Start in Life family voice sessions to hear from families and shape the plan including 2 in person sessions in January and February 2026. The Family Voice and engagement officers have been attending events and groups to meet directly with parents from September 2025 to date. This feedback has informed the development of the cross-cutting themes and priority areas as outlined in section 4.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The proposals in this report are funded through the Best Start in Life family hubs Grant. Brighton & Hove City Council is set to receive a provisional allocation of £1.979 million over three years from 2026/27 to 2028/29, with £225,000 specifically for capital projects. For the 2026/27 financial year, the council will get £694,200, including £73,500 earmarked for capital expenses. The grant requires that funds be used for additional service delivery, meet program guidelines, and achieve statutory targets. If these conditions aren't met, the funding may be reduced or withheld.

Name of finance officer consulted: David Ellis Date consulted (17/02/26):

7. Legal implications

7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Name of lawyer consulted: Serena Kynaston Date consulted 19.02.2026

8. Risk implications

8.1 The DfE requires Brighton & Hove City Council to publish a Best Start Plan by 31st March 2026 to meet the funding requirements for the Best Start Grant.

9. Equalities implications

9.1 The Best Start in Life Strategic plan is focused on providing accessible services to families with children from conception to 5 years to meet their unique individual needs. The plan addresses the need to target support for families with English as an additional language, SEND and families facing disadvantage through the priorities and cross cutting themes.

10. Sustainability implications

10.1 There are no sustainability implications.

11. Health and Wellbeing Implications:

11.1 A priority area for the Best Start Strategic Plan is focused on health and wellbeing for children and families linked to the neighbourhood health plan and Starting Well plan. (see Appendix 3, priority 3)

Other Implications

12. Procurement implications

12.1 There are no procurement implications.

13. Crime & disorder implications:

13.1 There are no implications.

14. Conclusion

14.1 The Best Start in Life Strategic plan meets the national requirements and has been developed in partnership with health partners, the voluntary and community sector, early years settings, schools and families to provide local priorities based on need and feedback.

- 14.2 As outlined in the report, the plan will focus on easy to access, high quality information, advice and support for all families with children from conception to five ensuring services work together to meet the needs of children and families to improve outcomes. There will be a focus on supporting those most at need which can be seen in Appendix 1.
- 14.3 The plan will ensure a clear direction for delivery to work towards the good level of development target for 2028.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

1. Best Start in Life Strategic Plan 2026-2029

