

Kent County Council

Best Start Local Plan

Document Owner	Ingrid Crisan – Director of Operational Integrated Children’s Services
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1. Foreword

On behalf of Kent County Council, we are proud to present its Best Start Local Plan: our strategic commitment to ensuring every baby, child and family across Kent has the foundations they need to thrive. As England's largest local authority, serving 1.8 million residents across a diverse landscape of rural, coastal and urban communities, Kent carries a significant responsibility to shape an Early Years system that is ambitious, equitable, and capable of supporting every family from pregnancy through to school age.

The early years, and particularly the first 1,001 days, lay the building blocks for lifelong health, learning and emotional security. How well we support families during this period influences children's future relationships, education, employment, mental health and overall wellbeing. Creating nurturing environments that support healthy lifestyles and behaviours is fundamental to children's longer-term health, wellbeing and life chances.

Our ambition is clear: we want every child in Kent, regardless of background, postcode or circumstance, to be ready to start Reception, ready for learning and able to flourish.

This plan outlines Kent's approach to delivering the Government's Best Start in Life Strategy, our statutory Good Level of Development (GLD) targets, and a whole system early years model centred on collaboration, evidence and inclusion.

This Local Plan sets out how Kent will deliver the Department for Education's Best Start in Life ambitions through a coherent, placebased Family Hub system that works closely with early years providers and schools to wrap around families and given them the best chance of nurturing healthy, happy and confident children.

Ingrid Crisan

Director Operational Integrated Children Services

Professor Dr. Anjan Ghosh

Director of Public Health

2. Our Vision, Mission and Purpose

Vision

Every child in Kent grows up safe, nurtured, curious, resilient and ready to learn, supported by strong families, connected communities and an Early Years System that works seamlessly around them.

Mission

To deliver a coordinated, inclusive and evidence informed early years system from conception to age five, ensuring all families, especially those facing disadvantage, receive the right support at the right time through accessible, high quality, integrated services.

Purpose of the Plan

- To set out how Kent will meet statutory targets for GLD.
- To define a clear strategic direction for delivering Best Start Family Hubs
- To ensure consistent, equitable early years support across Kent's diverse geography.
- To strengthen collaboration between health, education, childcare, and community partners.
- To provide accountability, structure and clarity for partners, staff and communities.

3. Understanding the National Strategy

The Government's **Best Start in Life Strategy** (2025) sets a national expectation that by 2028, at least **75% of children** will achieve a **Good Level of Development (GLD)** at age five. To support delivery of this ambition, the strategy establishes the following **Key National Drivers**:

- A whole-system approach integrating health, family services, early education and childcare and community organisations.

- Universal access to **Best Start Family Hubs** across England by April 2026.
- A strong focus on the **first 1,001 critical days**, when brain development is most rapid.
- Increased access to early years free entitlements and childcare, workforce reforms and strengthened accountability for early years outcomes.
- £1.5 billion of national investment over three years.

Why the First 1,001 Days Matter

The first 1,001 days (from conception to age two) shape the architecture of the brain, laying foundations for emotional regulation, communication, physical development and future learning. Children’s experiences during this window influence long-term health, wellbeing, relationships and educational attainment.

Experiences during pregnancy and the early postnatal period play a critical role in shaping parent–infant relationships, parental wellbeing and children’s early development. Variations in birth experiences, recovery needs and early health factors can increase support needs for some families, reinforcing the importance of timely, joined-up early years and family support.

Early, joined up support gives families the best chance of nurturing healthy, happy and confident children. This understanding underpins the Best Start in Life Strategy and is central to Kent’s approach.

Readiness to Start Reception

The Government states that helping children feel ready for school is a team effort; everything parents and carers do at home, alongside the care and learning they receive in childcare and early years education play a big part. From chatting and reading together, to encouraging independent skills like dressing or tidying up, all the little things parents and carers do each day help their child grow in confidence and curiosity. These simple moments build the foundation they need for starting Reception.

Locally, Kent’s approach to early childhood and readiness to start Reception aligns with the DfE’s Universal RISE (Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence) framework, which identifies Reception-year quality as one of four

national priorities for driving improved outcomes. While RISE focuses on strengthening the quality of Reception provision within schools, Best Start Family Hubs and the early years system contribute to this ambition by supporting earlier identification of need, parental confidence and children's early development, helping ensure children are well-prepared to benefit from high-quality Reception education.

What is Good Level of Development

Good Level of Development (GLD) is a national attainment measure used as the headline indicator of school readiness at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), assessed in the Reception year when children are five, recognising all of the influences on them since birth, including their access to early years and childcare provision.

A child is defined as having achieved GLD when they meet the expected standard in all of the prime areas of learning: communication and language, physical development, and personal, social and emotional development, as well as in the specific areas of literacy and mathematics.

GLD is assessed through the statutory EYFS Profile and is based on Reception Teachers' ongoing observation, evidence of learning and professional judgement, rather than formal testing.

GLD is important because it provides a nationally consistent picture of children's foundational development and reflects the core skills that underpin successful learning, wellbeing and progress throughout their school years.

Kent's Best Start Local Plan also aligns with wider national reform across children's services, education and SEND. The **Families First for Children Programme**, alongside the **Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill**, sets out the Government's approach to delivering earlier, more joined-up support for families, with a strong focus on prevention, family help, safeguarding and multi-agency working, closely aligning with the role of Best Start Family Hubs.

The Schools White Paper, **Every Child Achieving and Thriving**, alongside the consultation **SEND reform: putting children and young people first**, reinforces the importance of inclusion, early identification and ensuring children's needs are met earlier and more consistently, particularly for those with SEND. Together, these reforms underline the importance of integrated early years, health and

education systems, placing early intervention and family-centred support at the heart of improving outcomes for children.

4. Kent's Context and Our Local Journey

Kent's population is large, diverse and rapidly changing. Growth in migrant and refugee populations, widening inequalities, complex coastal challenges and rural isolation all shape the needs of families and the way early years services must be designed and delivered. This includes culturally inclusive resources, awareness and recognition of different ways of expressing needs. These factors have increasingly driven Kent to strengthen prevention, integration and place-based delivery across the early years system.

Poverty and economic disadvantage remain the strongest and most persistent drivers of poor GLD outcomes in Kent. While characteristics such as gender, term of birth and geography influence outcomes, children eligible for Free School Meals consistently experience the largest attainment gaps. These factors often intersect and compound disadvantage, which highlights the importance of targeting families who are facing economic hardship from the earliest stages of life.

Housing instability, including the use of temporary accommodation, can have a significant impact on families with young children, affecting health, development, access to services and continuity of support; children under five living in temporary accommodation may experience different needs and challenges, reinforcing the importance of early identification, outreach and integrated Family Hub support.

Kent's Best Start Local Plan has been developed in the context of wider national reform across education, SEND and Families First for Children. The plan aligns with the Government's direction of travel set out in recent Schools policy, SEND reform and Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) assessment developments, particularly the focus on early identification, inclusion, improved transitions and stronger collaboration between early years settings, schools and wider partners. As national policy and guidance continue to develop, Kent will reflect these changes through its governance and delivery arrangements.

Kent's Strategic Framework for Best Start

Over recent years, Kent has developed a strong, co-produced foundation of strategies that align with the Government's Best Start in Life priorities and provide a coherent framework for supporting families from pregnancy through to age five.

Kent's universal Health Visiting service provides a critical system foundation, offering consistent early contact with all families from pregnancy through the early years, enabling prevention, early identification and timely support aligned with Best Start Family Hubs.

Kent's Perinatal Mental Health and Parent Infant Relationships Strategy, **Nurturing Little Hearts and Minds**, recognises pregnancy and the first two years of life as a critical period for infant development and lifelong outcomes. It prioritises early, relationship-based and equitable support to promote parental mental wellbeing and strong parent–infant relationships, reflecting Kent's early focus on prevention and multi-agency working, with a particular focus on families facing disadvantage, delivered through coordinated, multi-agency working across health, early years and Family Hub services.

Nourishing Our Next Generation, Kent's five-year Infant Feeding Strategy (2024–2029), led by Kent County Council in partnership with the NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board, aims to ensure families are supported to make informed infant feeding decisions and can access consistent, skilled support, informed by national guidance and best practice. This has strengthened Kent's universal offer while ensuring additional support is available where it is most needed.

Raising Ambition, Enabling Curiosity, Building Resilience, a strategy for education in Kent (2025-2030) recognises early years as a critical foundation for the first 1,001 days and prioritises school readiness, early language development, inclusion and workforce capability, with a strong emphasis on joined-up working across education, health and family support services.

Informed by national best practice, external review and engagement with early years providers and families, Kent has remodelled its early years inclusion arrangements into a clearer, more coherent system, strengthening early intervention and reducing unnecessary complexity.

Best Start delivery aligns with Kent's **Starting Strong** framework, which sets out the universal support that all children and families should expect in early years settings. Together, these approaches illustrate a joined up system where universal provision, targeted Family Hub support and specialist services work seamlessly to meet need early and prevent escalation.

Delivery of the Best Start Local Plan also aligns with **Kent's SEND Strategy**, supporting earlier identification, inclusive practice and coordinated support for children with emerging and identified SEND across early years, health and education services.

Kent has a strong, sufficient, high quality early years and childcare market comprising well over 700 group settings (pre-schools and nurseries in the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors) and approximately 800 childminders. Ofsted outcomes across all of these are consistently very high and above national standards.

Kent also benefits from established regional and local early years quality-improvement infrastructure, including the DfE-funded Kent & Beyond Early Years Stronger Practice Hub based at Northfleet Nursery School. The Hub provides a strong foundation for workforce development, evidence-informed practice and system leadership to improve outcomes for children, particularly those facing disadvantage or with emerging SEND.

Early Years Entitlements, Health and Early Identification

Kent delivers a range of early years entitlements, including Early Learning for Two Year Olds (in Kent thus far called Free for Two, or FF2), and funding streams including Disability Access Fund, SENIF (Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund) and Early Years Pupil Premium. The Early Learning for Two Year Olds entitlement and these funding streams have increasingly been used as levers to direct additional resource towards children most at risk of poorer outcomes, supporting a more equitable early years system.

Early identification and intervention are supported through strong integration between education and health. Children aged two who attend an Early Years setting may receive an Integrated Review at Two, bringing together the Healthy Child Programme 2–2½ year review and the Early Years Foundation Stage

Progress Check. This reflects Kent's journey towards a 'tell your story once' approach, enabling earlier identification of need and more timely intervention for children and families.

Health Visiting Services deliver the national Healthy Child Programme for children aged 0–4 years, through a series of five mandated contacts, four of which are direct contacts with the child. These contacts, aligned to the Healthy Child Programme schedule, include the mandated 2–2½ year health and wellbeing review using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3). Across these universal contacts, as well as through healthy child clinics and in response to concerns raised by parents or carers, health visitors routinely identify emerging needs. This provides a consistent universal platform from which targeted and additional support or intervention can be offered promptly where concerns are identified.

National evidence indicates a growing proportion of children are starting school with delayed independence skills, including toileting, feeding and self-care. These challenges are often rooted in the early years and, if not identified and addressed early, can affect children's readiness to learn and place additional pressure on early years settings and schools. This reinforces the importance of Kent's integrated early identification approach through Health Visiting, early years settings and Family Hubs.

Early Language

Kent has strengthened its early language offer through the introduction of the Early Language Identification Measure (ELIM) within universal and targeted pathways, building on learning from earlier initiatives to support earlier identification of speech, language and communication needs and reducing pressure on specialist services.

Alongside ELIM, Kent benefits from accessible, preventative speech, language and communication support delivered in community settings. Talking Walk In sessions, led by Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust Children's Therapies Service and delivered through Family Hubs, enable parents and carers to access advice and informal assessment without the need for a formal referral. This illustrates Kent's progression from pilot activity to embedded, community-based provision, ensuring support is proportionate, timely and accessible.

Importantly, children's early language development is well supported and nurtured in early years and childcare provisions across Kent.

Sufficiency and Place-Based Delivery

Whilst Kent has a long-standing and well established sufficient early years and childcare market, to meet growing demand and deliver funded entitlements, Kent is aiming and planning for sufficient, sustainable early years provision, including the potential expansion of school-based nursery provision alongside the private, voluntary and independent sector.

Kent is also aligning Best Start delivery with wider place-based system developments, including emerging neighbourhood health approaches. Building on its previous role as a national Family Hub and Start for Life Transformation Authority, Kent is now moving into the next phase of delivery, strengthening integration, improving consistency and accelerating progress towards improved child development outcomes and school readiness across the county.

5. Kent's GLD Targets and Improvement Challenges

Kent must achieve **two statutory GLD targets** by the end of 2027/28:

1. **77%** of all children achieving GLD
2. **57.7%** of Free School Meal (FSM) eligible children achieving GLD

Current Performance Themes in Kent

- Literacy is the lowest area of learning within GLD with writing being the lowest Early Learning Goal (ELG) within literacy.
- Word reading (another component of Literacy) is the second lowest ELG.
- The gap for those eligible for Free School Meals is wider than national averages.
- Differences remain between East and West Kent.
- Boys consistently perform lower than girls.
- Autumn born children perform better than their peers.

Data from the 2–2½ year review shows variation in the proportion of children achieving expected developmental levels across domains, with particularly low attainment in fine motor skills.

In 2024/25 the proportion achieving a good level of development by the end of reception and the variation from children eligible for free school meals and children not eligible for free school meals is considerable as shown below.

	Free school meals	variation	Non-free school meals
England	51.3%	21.3%	72.5%
South East	49.4%	25.1%	74.5%
Kent	50.7%	22.8%	73.5%

Source: Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), *Early Years Foundation Stage Profile – Good Level of Development at age 5 by free school meal eligibility*, Fingertips Public Health Data, England, South East and Kent: [Level of development at age 5 - Social Mobility Commission State of the Nation - GOV.UK](#)

Across three years of data, fine motor development is the most significant area of under-performance relative to national averages, with clear implications for later writing, self-care and GLD outcomes:

	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	Kent	England	Kent	England	Kent	England
Achieving the expected level in communication skills	89.9%	85.3%	89.8%	86.6%	90.4%	87.6%
Achieving the expected level in problem solving skills	93.5%	91.8%	93.7%	92.5%	94.6%	93%
Achieving the expected level in fine motor skills	79.7%	92.6%	78.1%	93.3%	79.5%	93.7%
Achieving the expected level in gross motor skills	91.9%	92.8%	91.3%	93.3%	91.6%	93.6%
Achieving the expected level in personal, social skills	91.7%	90.3%	91.5%	91.2%	91.8%	91.8%
Achieving a good level of development across all five domains	71.5%	79.2%	70.3%	80.4%	70.7%	81.4%

Source: Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), *Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) outcomes from the 2–2½-year Health and Wellbeing Review*, Fingertips Public Health Data, Kent and England, 2022/23–2024/25: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/child-health-profiles>

Looking at those achieving a good level of development across all five domains by gender, Kent shows approximately 10% difference each year across the same time frames with females higher than males.

While several characteristics influence early outcomes, poverty remains the most persistent and system-wide driver of poor GLD outcomes in Kent. As a result, this plan places a primary focus on improving outcomes for children eligible for Free School Meals, recognising that disadvantage often intersects with factors such as gender, term of birth and SEND

Why This Matters

GLD is a strong predictor of later attainment, school readiness, reading proficiency and emotional wellbeing. Improving GLD is therefore not only an education priority, but also a public health, social justice and economic imperative, requiring early identification, effective intervention and coordinated support for children and families from the earliest stages of life.

Targeted Funding and System Levers

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) is additional funding (up to £570 per year) for early years providers in England to support children aged 9 months to 4 years who are accessing funded entitlements and meet specific criteria, including children from low income families, those in care, or those adopted from care. This funding enables settings to strengthen early communication and language, self regulation, play and home learning environments. Alongside wider Best Start system improvements in early identification, workforce capability and integrated health and family support, effective use and support increased uptake of EYPP is a key part of Kent's approach to narrowing attainment gaps and improving GLD outcomes for children eligible for Free School Meals. Kent's early years and childcare provisions play a crucial part in this, providing high quality environments and experiences to support those at risk of under achievement, enabling children to reach their full potential.

6. Insights from Families and Partners

During Kent's Family Hub transformation, 31Ten Consultancy were commissioned to help build our understanding of the barriers and enablers, for our vulnerable families and underserved groups in accessing our Family Hub offer. Through the 31Ten review, parent voice engagement, and provider feedback, families and professionals highlighted:

A. Communication, Engagement and Co-production

- Services must be more visible and easier to navigate.
- Families want informal, diverse and creative engagement spaces.
- Communications must better reflect Kent's diversity.
- Co-production must be embedded across all Family Hub design and delivery.

B. Delivery of the Core Offer

- Underserved groups require flexible, culturally-informed support.
- More integration between services is needed to avoid duplication.
- Workforce capacity varies between districts and partners.
- Families value relational continuity - 'one person' who knows their story.
- Access to specialist support in hospital and in the community would enable Mothers to continue breastfeeding when they encounter challenges

These insights shape the approach and commitments outlined in this plan.

7. Kent's Best Start System: Principles and Strategic Priorities

Kent's Strengths

- A strong multiagency partnership landscape
- A track record of innovation in Start for Life delivery
- A more than sufficient supply of early years and childcare places
- Positive early years Ofsted outcomes
- A strong and existing network of Family Hubs
- Co-produced strategies with parents and carers and underserved groups.
- Established system leadership and evidence-informed approaches to early years quality improvement.

Key Challenges

- Persistent health, development and skills inequalities
- Deprivation concentrated in districts such as Swale, Thanet and Dover
- Variability in access to services in coastal and rural areas
- Government levels of early years funding and associated sustainability pressures, which are linked to expanded childcare entitlements; across Kent we have c10,000 surplus places
- In the context of sustainability pressures in early years and childcare provisions recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff is a significant challenge
- Achievement gap between eligible and non-eligible Free School Meals children
- Impact of cost of living on families

Together, these strengths and challenges inform how Kent applies its system principles and determines its strategic priorities to improve outcomes.

Kent's Best Start Local Plan is underpinned by a small number of system-wide principles that describe how we work, alongside a focused set of strategic priorities that describe what we must get right to improve outcomes for children and families and meet our GLD targets.

Our System Principles

Our Best Start system is:

- **Child-centred and inclusive:** ensuring equity of access, experience and outcomes for all children and families, particularly those facing disadvantage and from underserved groups
- **Collaborative and place-based:** designed and delivered through strong partnership working across health, education, childcare, community and voluntary sectors, shaped by local need.
- **Evidence informed and quality driven:** using data, research and lived experience to guide decisions, further strengthen the quality of early years provision, and support continuous improvement.
- **Sustainable:** strengthening workforce capability, service quality and system capacity to support long-term impact.

These principles guide all strategic decisions, investment and delivery across Kent's Best Start system.

Our Strategic Priorities

Based on Kent's context, performance evidence and what families and partners have told us, the plan is structured around **three interconnected priorities**, each of which contributes directly to improving Good Level of Development outcomes and family wellbeing.

Priority 1: Raising Ambition and Reducing Inequality

Improving readiness to start reception and narrowing attainment gaps by strengthening early development, targeting support where it is most needed, and ensuring all children benefit from high quality early education and childcare.

Priority 2: Enabling Curiosity, Communication and Learning

Strengthening early language, communication, play in home learning environments and early years and childcare provisions so children develop the foundations for learning, confidence and curiosity from the earliest stages.

Priority 3: Building Family Resilience and Wellbeing

Supporting parental mental health, infant feeding, parent–infant relationships and community connection to create the stable, nurturing environments children need to thrive.

These priorities provide the framework for Kent’s delivery commitments set out below.

8. How We Will Deliver: Kent’s Commitments

Kent will deliver its Best Start ambitions through a coordinated set of commitments aligned to the strategic priorities above, with Best Start Family Hubs acting as the central delivery mechanism.

Priority 1: Raising Ambition and Reducing Inequality

Early years and childcare providers in the private, voluntary and independent sectors, schools and academies, are key partners in delivering the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and achieving improved Good Level of Development outcomes across Kent.

Improving Good Level of Development outcomes will be supported through evidence-informed quality improvement and workforce development, with a particular focus on early language, literacy, mathematics and personal, social and emotional development for children facing disadvantage or with emerging SEND.

We will:

- Establish Best Start Family Hubs as a central access point for families, providing a single, welcoming space where health, education, childcare and community services work together from pregnancy to age five (and up to 19, or 25 with SEND).
- Maximise early identification through the Health Visiting universal contacts and developmental reviews, including use of ASQ-3, to identify children with emerging needs and enable timely, targeted support through Best Start Family Hubs, contributing to improved readiness for Reception and future GLD outcomes.
- Strengthen the effective use of EYPP by supporting provider understanding of its purpose, evidence-informed practice and impact, ensuring funding is used to improve outcomes for children facing disadvantage.
- Support early years providers and schools to strengthen EYFS and EYFSP assessment practice, improve consistency in identifying need, and align early support with emerging SEND and inclusion reforms.
- Ensuring sufficient, sustainable early years and childcare provision across Kent, including supporting the development of school-based nursery provision alongside the private, voluntary and independent sector.
- Use GLD, EYFSP data and Kent School Health data (including school readiness questionnaires) to share “ambitions” with each school to indicate their contribution to achieving the County target and to identify early years settings whose former children do not go on to achieve GLD, to enable proportionate, targeted support to be offered. This will include alignment with early years provision and Best Start Family Hub support, ensuring schools, families and services work together to address underlying barriers to learning, particularly for children facing disadvantage.
- Maximise early identification through Health Visiting universal contacts and developmental reviews, with Health Visitors acting as a key access and referral route into Best Start Family Hubs for families who would benefit from targeted or additional support.

- KCC will work with The Education People (TEP) and other education partners to provide targeted, proportionate support to early years and childcare providers in the private, voluntary and independent sectors, schools and academies where this will have the greatest impact on EYFS quality and GLD outcomes, recognising the diversity of school governance arrangements across the county.
- Continue to strengthen universal early years support through linked practitioners who work directly with early years settings to review quality, support inclusive practice and provide advice and guidance. This role acts as the first point of contact for emerging concerns, ensuring issues are addressed early and proportionately and reducing the need for escalation to targeted or specialist services.
- Using primary school admissions processes to provide supportive advice to families about school readiness expectations.

Priority 2: Enabling Curiosity, Communication and Learning

We will:

- Strengthen early language and communication through the continued implementation of the Early Language Identification Measure (ELIM) within universal and targeted offers.
- Embed evidence-based parenting and home learning environment support through Family Hubs, helping parents build strong early interaction, communication and play. This includes structured early language programmes such as Communication Tree and Little Talkers, delivered through Family Hubs and developed and quality assured by NHS speech and language therapy services, to support families' understanding of how to develop children's communication skills in the early years.
- Improve access to trusted, evidence-based information through high-quality digital and face-to-face offers. This includes universal digital advice on children's physical and motor development, such as resources provided by NHS children's therapy services, the Born to Move App, Kent Baby webpages, online Toileting and School Readiness sessions,

enabling families to access consistent, reliable guidance from pregnancy through the early years.

- Continue to support and grow Playground, an innovative programme promoting creativity, inclusion and resilience for babies and young children, particularly those with additional needs.
- Promote take-up of early education entitlements, including Early Learning for 2-year-olds (formerly known in Kent as Free For 2), through targeted outreach in communities where participation is lowest.
- Continue to improve access to early speech, language and communication support through Family Hubs, including Talking Walk-In sessions delivered in partnership with NHS children's therapy services, ensuring families can access the right level of support at the right time.
- Continue to promote the 'Integrated Review at Two process which brings together the Healthy Child Programme Health and Development Review at age two to two and a half and the Early Years Foundation Stage Progress Check at Age Two to enable early identification and facilitate appropriate intervention and support for children and their families, especially those for whom progress is less than expected

These actions are intended to directly improve communication and language outcomes within the EYFS prime areas, contributing to improved GLD at age five

Priority 3: Building Family Resilience and Wellbeing

We will:

- Enable and encourage families to become confident parents, by providing access to information, support and services which reflects their parenting needs such as increased preparation antenatally
- Continue to implement Kent's co-produced Perinatal Mental Health and Parent–Infant Relationships Strategy: Nurturing Little Hearts and Minds, ensuring families receive timely, relationship-based support.

- Continue to implement Kent's Infant Feeding Strategy, enabling families to make informed feeding decisions and access consistent, skilled support in the right place and at the right time.
- Ensure Family Hubs deliver targeted outreach to underserved communities, including families facing disadvantage, minority ethnic groups, fathers and families less likely to engage with traditional services.
- Strengthen integrated, multi-agency working within each Family Hub through shared data, aligned practice and collaborative planning around families.
- Embed coproduction with parents and carers across Family Hub design and delivery so services are shaped by lived experience and local need.
- Continue to provide information to families about early years and childcare options and entitlements including through the Children and Families Information Service
- To support families to develop toileting independence before children start school.
- In line with the NHS England Three Year Delivery Plan for Maternity and Neonatal Services, Kent will work with NHS Trusts and system partners to support delivery of the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) standard for infant feeding by March 2027, strengthening the quality and consistency of infant feeding support across hospital and community services.
- Provide clear and consistent public health messaging to support families to live healthy lives

Workforce and System Capability

Across all priorities, we will:

- Support early years and childcare workforce quality recruitment, retention and development.

- Offer advice, training and support to further improve inclusive, high-quality provision, measured through Ofsted outcomes.
- Maximise the contribution of existing regional and local quality-improvement infrastructure, including the Kent & Beyond Early Years Stronger Practice Hub based at Northfleet Nursery School, to support professional development, evidence-informed practice and system-wide improvement aligned to GLD priorities.
- Draw upon the specialist expertise of Northfleet Nursery School, Kent's maintained nursery school, in inclusive practice, SEND and support for disadvantaged children, to support wider system improvement through professional learning and contribution to early identification and inclusion pathways.
- Build on Kent's specialist early years support offer, including the transition of specialist nursery provision from school-based to outreach models, and use ongoing evaluation to inform future commissioning, targeting and system improvement.
- Continue to implement the prior recommendations of Kent's Early Years Review to strengthen universal, targeted and specialist support. This includes learning from recent reviews of early years services and commissioned provision to ensure continuous improvement and best use of specialist expertise.
- Continue to engage early years providers through strong partnerships, including the Early Years and Childcare Provider Association.

9. Governance and Accountability

Kent will operate a clear, multi-layered governance structure that includes:

- A strategic Best Start in Life and Family Hubs Board
- Operational delivery groups

- District-level Local Children’s Partnership Groups (LCPG)
- Strong links to Public Health, SEND governance, education partnerships and Families First

Governance will ensure transparent decision making, financial accountability, and progress monitoring against targets.

10. Measuring Progress and Outcomes

Actions within this plan span pregnancy, early childhood and Reception age, and will therefore contribute to improvements in GLD over different timescales, with early prevention activity (from pregnancy to age two) delivering longer-term impact, pre-school interventions (from ages two to four) supporting medium-term improvement, and Reception-focused actions having the most immediate effect.

Measuring progress towards improved child development and school readiness requires us to look beyond statutory end-point measures. In addition to the EYFS Profile and GLD outcomes at age five, Kent will make use of population-level Health Visiting developmental data, including aggregated Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) outcomes from the 2–2½ year review, as an early indicator of children’s developmental progress. While ASQ data does not replace GLD as the statutory measure of school readiness, it provides an important early signal of emerging trends in communication, social and emotional, and physical development. Used alongside EYFS and GLD data, this intelligence will support earlier identification of inequalities, enable timely and proportionate intervention through Best Start Family Hubs, and help track whether system-wide improvements are on course to deliver improved GLD outcomes at age five.

Kent will monitor:

- Ofsted outcomes across the early years and childcare sector
- Progress towards GLD targets
- EYFS outcomes across all groups
- The uptake of the Early Learning for Two Years Olds entitlement, against government targets for this

- Access to Family Hub services
- Parent satisfaction and feedback
- Workforce capacity and stability

KCC will use its outcomes and performance framework to identify which approaches are having the greatest impact on early development and school readiness. Evidence from data, practice insight and family feedback will inform decisions about adapting, embedding or scaling interventions across the system. This approach will support continuous learning while ensuring resources are focused on what works best for children and families.

11. Our Commitments by 2028

By 2028, Kent will have:

- An accessible network of Best Start Family Hubs, including outreach and digital offers, where every parent, carer and child feels seen, heard and supported.
- Improved child development outcomes and readiness to starting Reception, as evidenced by the number of children achieving a GLD
- Narrowed GLD gaps for children eligible for Free School Meals
- Strengthened parental confidence and engagement
- A consistently high quality and sustained early years and childcare sector
- A system designed with families, not for them