



Suffolk **BEST START LOCAL PLAN**

2026 to 2029



 **BEST**
 **START**
 **IN LIFE**

This Best Start Local Plan sets out how everyone working with babies, children and families in Suffolk will work together, ensuring that we do all we can to support all children in Suffolk to achieve a Good Level of Development.





INTRODUCTION

Every baby and child in Suffolk deserves the very best start in life. The early years shape a child's health, learning, confidence, and future opportunities.

Developmental progress in the early years is measured at the end of Reception year (the year children turn five) through a Good Level of Development (GLD) review. This a way of reviewing how children are developing and it helps us understand whether children are building the skills and confidence they need for the next stage of learning. Children who reach a Good Level of Development at the end of reception year, have a strong foundation for their ongoing growth, giving them the skills and confidence they need to thrive as they move through childhood.

Suffolk's vision for Best Start is rooted in the realities of our county, its strengths, its inequities, and the diverse needs of babies, young children and families.

Our data shows clear variations in early development linked to deprivation, with children growing up in our most disadvantaged communities significantly less likely to achieve a Good Level of Development.

We also face the distinct challenge of being a largely rural county, where long travel distances, limited transport, and uneven access to services make it harder for many families to receive timely support. These factors shape our place-based approach and strengthen our commitment to reducing inequalities that begin in the earliest years of life

IN 2025



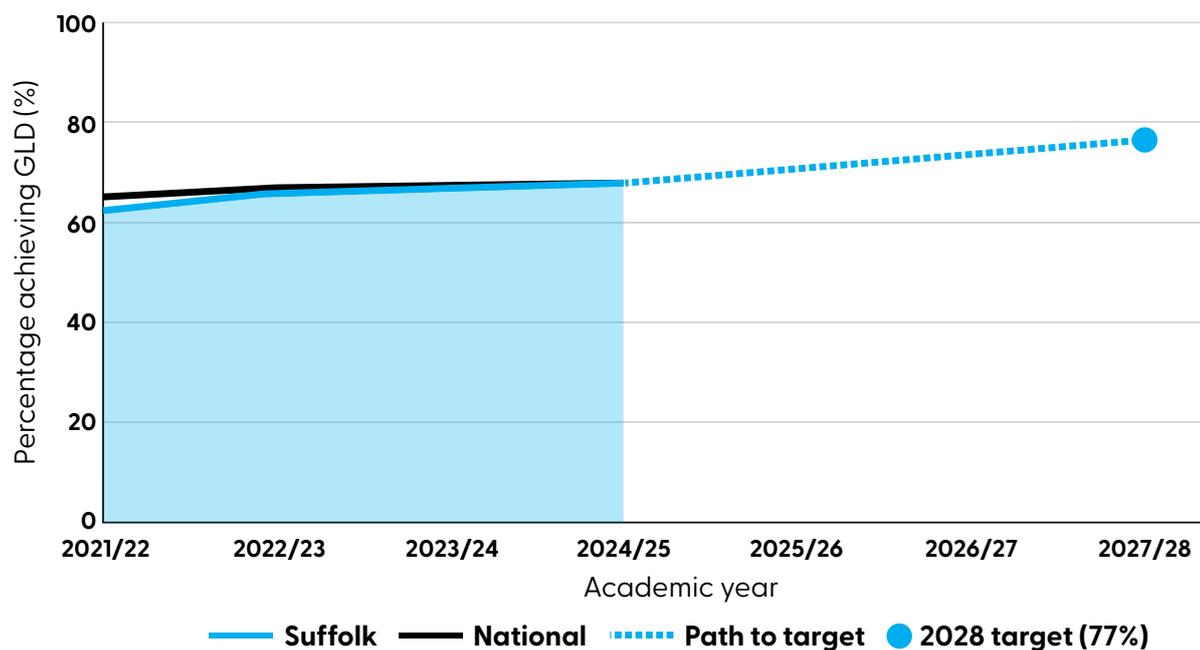
Although this has been improving year on year, it is slightly below the national average.

Suffolk has set an ambitious but essential goal, to ensure that:



Good level of development - overall

Suffolk





PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

The Best Start Local Plan will be overseen through Suffolk's Partnership Strategic Alliance. The Strategic Alliance Board brings together senior leaders from local partners to provide shared oversight, collective decision making and strategic direction for improving outcomes for babies, children and families across Suffolk.

This ensures strong leadership, clear accountability and a coordinated, systemwide approach.

The Strategic Alliance is developing a new Early Help Strategy that sets out how partners across education, health, community services and the voluntary sector will work together to provide joined-up, timely support for children, young people and families.

Within this strategy, Best Start is a priority area, focusing on giving babies, young children and their families the strongest foundations for life.

The guiding principles in this plan were developed through the Early Help Strategy and describe the shared values and ways of working partners have committed to.

These principles underpin the entire Best Start approach:



Awareness & Accessibility

We make support easy to find and understand by ensuring clear, welcoming and inclusive communication and removing barriers to access.



Workforce Empowerment

We create the conditions for a confident, connected and supported workforce through shared expectations, continuous learning and collaborative practice.



Family Experience & Voice

We recognise families as partners, designing and improving services with them, and ensuring every interaction feels respectful, responsive and empowering.



System Integration & Collective Responsibility

We operate as one joined-up system, using shared outcomes, aligned resources and coordinated leadership to deliver seamless support and prevent duplication.

This plan has been developed collaboratively across the Strategic Alliance, bringing together midwifery, health visiting, early years, Family Help, Public Health, VCFSE partners, education, libraries, Best Start Family Hubs and wider community organisations. Partners worked collectively to review evidence, analyse local need, and agree a shared set of priorities.

This plan also aligned with other local strategies including:

[Suffolk SEND Strategy 2024-29](#)

[Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2027-27](#)



OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

An outcomes framework is a tool that helps everyone including services, communities, and families to:

- Work towards the same goals: It creates a shared understanding of the priorities for babies and children in Suffolk
- Understand what is making a difference: By looking at the measures within the framework, we can see where babies and children are thriving and where more focussed activity is needed.

The Best Start Partnership will adopt use of this framework which provides a shared, flexible approach for defining and measuring what matters most for babies, children, and young people. It aligns these under a small set of domains: as being safe, healthy, happy, learning, and engaged.



All babies children and young people:

	<p>SAFE</p> <p>Personal security</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are and feel physically and emotionally safe at home, at school and in their communities ● Are protected from harm, threats and the impact of adversity ● Have a secure, stable, caring home environment
	<p>HEALTHY</p> <p>Physical wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are physically healthy and make positive health choices ● Are protected from preventable diseases
	<p>HAPPY</p> <p>Social, emotional and personal wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have their emotional, social and personal needs met ● Are supported to build resilience ● Enjoy play, recreation, sport, arts, culture and nature
	<p>LEARNING</p> <p>Cognitive and metacognitive development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are learning and developing from birth in a supportive home learning environment ● Are gaining the knowledge and skills they need for later childhood and adult life ● Are motivated, ready to learn and aspire for the future
	<p>ENAGAGED</p> <p>Feel engaged in a community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are happy with family life, their friendships and connections ● Have a choice of things to do and places to go ● Feel valued and respected and that they belong to a community ● Have their voices heard and acted upon

The Strategic Alliance Partnership will develop this outcomes framework to provide consistent oversight of progress across the system. By reviewing shared data, performance measures and feedback within each domain, the Partnership will be able to identify strengths, emerging needs and areas that require further focus.

This will enable partners to take collective responsibility for improvement, inform ongoing service development, and ensure that support for families is continually adapted in response to what the evidence shows is working well. Through this shared approach, the framework becomes a mechanism for driving sustained improvement and aligning delivery across all organisations contributing to the Best Start offer.

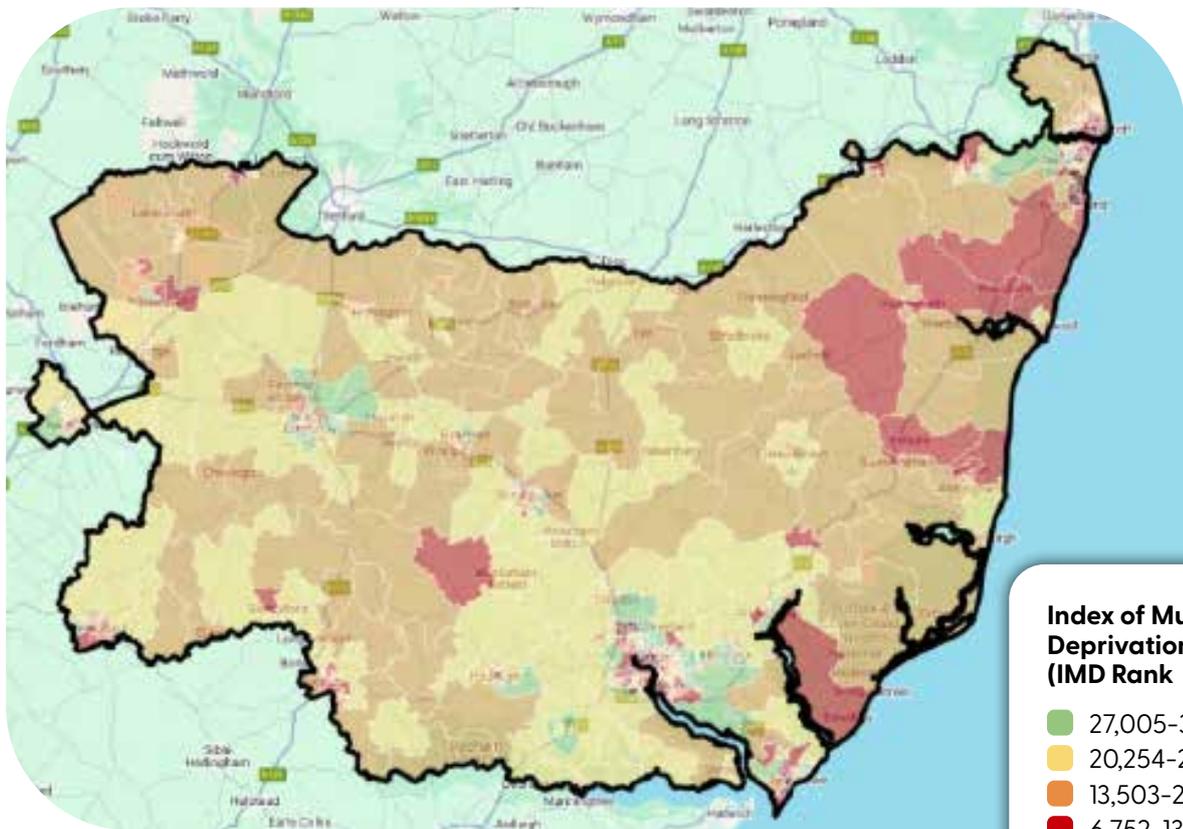
WHAT DOES OUR DATA TELL US & WHY IT MATTERS FOR EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT

In Suffolk,
approximately
45,350
children
aged 0-5

Suffolk ranked
190
on the Income
Deprivation
Affecting Children
Index (IDACI)

average
deprived
category for
child poverty
(top 59%).

Babies and children growing up in deprived areas are significantly more likely to experience poorer early development such as lower rates of achieving a good level of development, higher health needs, and reduced cognitive and socio emotional outcomes with strong evidence showing a clear correlation between deprivation and early childhood outcomes.



Index of Multiple Deprivation 2025 (IMD Rank)

- 27,005-33,755
- 20,254-27,004
- 13,503-20,253
- 6,752-13,502
- 1-6,751

Suffolk is a largely rural county, and this brings real strengths as well as challenges. Many families value the close knit communities, green spaces and supportive local networks that are such an important part of Suffolk life. At the same time, living far from towns or services, having limited public transport, or facing long travel distances can make it harder for some families to get early years support when they need it.

Although Suffolk is less diverse than many other parts of England, we want to make sure that every family can easily access early information, feel confident seeking support, and receive the right help at the right time.

By recognising this openly, we can work in partnership with families to understand their experiences, build on what is strong within communities, and remove any barriers that lead to unfair or unequal outcomes.

Alongside this, we see wider inequalities linked to deprivation, rural isolation, transport, housing, and different family circumstances. Children living in our most deprived areas, or in remote rural locations, often face greater challenges in accessing early years support, early education, health services or specialist help. These issues can intersect with ethnicity, disability, language and family situation, meaning some children experience multiple disadvantages at the same time.



Best Start in Suffolk is committed to taking an equity led approach.

This means valuing the strengths of every family, ensuring services are respectful and inclusive, and focusing on early identification, easy to navigate pathways and support that can flex around different needs. By working with families through co production, investing in workforce development, and targeting support where it is most needed, we can reduce disproportionality, close gaps and make sure every baby and child in Suffolk has an equally positive, culturally respectful and confident start in life.



USING DATA TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

We hold detailed data that includes children’s demographic information (such as age, gender, deprivation, SEND status and eligibility for Free School Meals) alongside outcomes across the Early Learning Goals for each area of learning, enabling us to understand which groups of children are achieving a Good Level of Development and where support is most needed.

Additionally, across organisations, we routinely collect and review key measures from the earliest stages of life, such as access to maternity care and maternal health, health visiting contacts and developmental reviews, uptake and quality of early education, and levels of deprivation. These indicators are known to correlate strongly with children’s later developmental outcomes at age five.

Monitoring these measures closely helps us identify emerging risks early, respond with timely support, and prevent gaps from widening throughout a child’s early development.

By identifying early indicators pre conceptually, during pregnancy and in the earliest months and years and responding proactively as a partnership rather than reactively, we can tailor our information, outreach and support so that families receive the right help at the right time. This ensures we are maximising developmental progress in the first five years, improving children’s learning, health and wellbeing trajectories, and ultimately enabling more children to achieve a strong start and reach a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception.

The following section outlines what is working well, our key areas of focus aligned to the 5 outcome areas for babies and children.



SAFE

Personal security

Whats going well	Areas of focus
<p>Good engagement with midwifery and health visiting services</p> <p>Supports access to universal information and support and enables early identification of needs.</p>	<p>Hospital admissions for babies under 14 days including for accidental injuries and readmissions</p> <p>Early hospital admissions can signal unmet needs or gaps in postnatal support, which may affect infant health and early development.</p>
<p>Low hospital admissions among 0–5 year olds</p> <p>Fewer hospital admissions reflect better general health and allow children to experience fewer interruptions to play, learning, and social interaction.</p>	<p>Numbers of babies on Child Protection Plans</p> <p>Recognising parents and carers as key protective factors, and by further supporting and empowering them in their vital role in improving outcomes for children.</p> <p>Experiencing instability or harm during a critical period for brain development, which can undermine secure attachment, emotional regulation, and early learning.</p>



HEALTHY

Physical wellbeing

Whats going well	Areas of focus
<p>High rates of breastfeeding initiation</p> <p>Breastfeeding strengthens babies' immune systems, supports bonding, and contributes to healthy brain development in the crucial early months of life.</p>	<p>Access to mental health support for expectant and new parents</p> <p>Parents emotional wellbeing directly influences bonding, responsiveness, and the overall emotional environment that shapes a baby's early brain development.</p>

Whats going well	Areas of focus
<p>High vaccination uptake</p> <p>Strong vaccination coverage helps keep children healthy, enabling them to grow, learn, and reach early developmental milestones without preventable illnesses.</p>	<p>Breastfeeding continuation at 6–8 weeks</p> <p>We have improving rates, but commit to remain focussed on sustained breastfeeding which boosts immunity, strengthens attachment, and supports healthy nutrition and brain development in infancy.</p>
	<p>Healthy Weight and Oral Health</p> <p>Focusing on children’s healthy weight in the early years is important because these foundational habits influence lifelong health, development and wellbeing, helping to prevent future health inequalities.</p>



HAPPY

Social, emotional and personal wellbeing

Whats going well	Areas of focus
<p>Taking steps to improve mechanisms that enable us to understand children’s experiences.</p>	<p>Limited measures to understand this outcome area</p> <p>measurement of children’s happiness and emotional wellbeing across early years services provides insight to shape support, strengthen relationships with families, and ensure that our Best Start approach meets children’s social and emotional needs from the earliest stage.</p>



LEARNING

Cognitive and metacognitive development

Whats going well	Areas of focus
<p>Positive outcomes at the 2½ year development check</p> <p>Strong performance in communication, motor skills, and problem solving demonstrates that children are developing well and benefitting from early support.</p>	<p>Positive outcomes for managing self and personal and social development:</p> <p>At 2½ year developmental check and GLD.</p>

Whats going well	Areas of focus
<p>Above average take up of early education places for disadvantaged 2 year olds, and steady participation among 3 year olds:</p> <p>High engagement in early education provides children with rich opportunities for learning, play, social interaction, and routine, all of which support language development, confidence, and readiness for school.</p>	<p>Inequalities in early learning and wider child development.</p> <p>Children who are FSM eligible, children with English as an Additional Language (EAL), children receiving SEND support, summer born children, and children from global majority backgrounds continue to experience lower GLD outcomes.</p>



ENGAGED

Cognitive and metacognitive development

Whats going well	Areas of focus
<p>Early booking with midwives:</p> <p>Early maternity contact supports healthy pregnancies by providing timely advice and identifying any risks that may affect a baby's early development.</p>	<p>Develop Best Start Family Hub Approach</p> <p>Strengthening early relationships, improving family wellbeing, and creating consistent pathways of help. Best Start Family Hubs bring services together, making it easier for parents and carers to navigate support, access evidence based interventions, and build connections within their community.</p>
<p>High participation in health visiting contacts and developmental reviews</p> <p>Regular contact ensures early developmental needs are spotted and addressed quickly, supporting timely, responsive early intervention for children and families.</p> <p>Our VCFSE partners play a vital role in reaching families early with trusted information, inclusive activities, and tailored support rooted in local communities</p>	<p>Parents, carers and communities to shape the design and delivery of our Best Start Family Hub approach</p> <p>Ensuring it reflects the lived experiences, strengths and priorities of local families. Through ongoing co production, community conversations and regular opportunities for feedback, we will create services that are accessible, culturally responsive and rooted in what families tell us they need. This partnership approach will help us design support that works for all families particularly those who face additional barriers.</p>
<p>Our VCFSE partners play a vital role in reaching families early with trusted information, inclusive activities, and tailored support rooted in local communities</p>	



OUR PARTNERSHIP PRIORITIES

By reviewing data and understanding what is working well and where improvement is needed, we can take collective responsibility for ensuring that we continue to sustain our areas of strength and improve on areas where we know we can be doing better.

Through this shared commitment, we will maximise the effective use of resources and strengthen joint working, ensuring that together we achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families.

Our priorities have been identified through our areas for focus highlighted through our local data, strengthened by practitioner insight and the experiences shared by families.

These represent the changes most critical to improving developmental outcomes, tackling inequalities, and ensuring families experience coordinated and responsive support. Each priority will continue to be shaped through co production with families and practitioners.

1

Strengthen Family Experience and Community Engagement

Develop and implement robust mechanisms for families and communities to actively contribute to the design and delivery of the Best Start approach, ensuring their lived experiences shape how services are planned, improved, and delivered, with a particular focus on amplifying the voices of underrepresented communities and addressing barriers to equitable access.

2

Improve Awareness, Accessibility through implementation of Best Start Family Hubs

Develop and implement a clear, accessible Best Start Family Hub offer that brings together all core services warm welcome and whole family support, maternal and

early years health services, perinatal mental health pathways, parent–infant relationship support, infant feeding support, home learning and parenting support, early childhood education and care (ECEC), and SEND information and navigation.

3

Persistent focus on up take of education entitlement

Our performance is currently in line with national averages. We remain ambitious and are focused on achieving our stretch target of 87.5% 2 year olds who qualify for a 15 hour funded place because of low family income, SEND needs or having ever been a child in care

by improving understanding of entitlements, increasing take up, supporting sufficiency and quality across early years provision, and ensuring smooth transitions for children.



4

Build a Consistent and Skilled Partnership Workforce

Agree and embed shared principles and practice approaches across the workforce, with an increased focus on the role of VCFSE partners and volunteers, ensuring consistent, high quality delivery of the Best Start approach and evidence based interventions.

5

Embed a Partnership Outcomes Framework with Shared Indicators

Develop and implement a partnership outcomes framework with aligned KPIs to track progress, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and drive collective action across all partners.

6

Strengthen Early Identification and Support for Babies, Children and Parents

Improve early identification of risks and needs for babies; enhance access to mental health support for expectant and new parents; and increase breastfeeding continuation through coordinated, accessible support.



7

Improve Early Learning and Development, Including Speech, Language and Communication.

Use detailed GLD data and family insights to identify and plan for approaches to address inequalities. Embed the WellComm tool for consistent Speech Language and Communication Needs assessment and strengthen targeted, evidence based support to improve children's outcomes in communication, personal, social and emotional development.

**8**

Monitor and Scale What Works, Including High Impact Evidence Based Interventions.

Develop robust mechanisms to monitor access to, and impact of, Best Start Family Hubs; and scale delivery of evidence based interventions such as the Solihull Approach and EasyPeasy to widen access to high impact support that improves the home learning environment and support parents.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

To ensure that resources are used effectively and deliver the greatest impact for babies, young children and families, Suffolk will prioritise funding in line with our assessed local needs, evidence of what works, and the strengths of our local assets.

Resource will be focussed towards the areas and communities where inequalities are most pronounced particularly those with lower Good Level of Development outcomes, higher deprivation, or reduced access to services due to rurality. Investment decisions will be aligned to our agreed priorities and targeted to strengthen early identification, improve access to high impact support, and expand evidence based interventions across the county.

We will maximise the value of the Family Hub Development Grant by directing it towards activities that enhance the Best Start Family Hub approach, including improving accessibility, strengthening workforce capability, supporting targeted outreach, and embedding core services within localities. This approach enables us to deploy resources where they will make the greatest difference and ensures that our investment is responsive to emerging needs, family feedback and ongoing evaluation.

SUFFOLK'S BEST START FAMILY HUB APPROACH

Delivery of this plan will be enabled through the development of Suffolk's Best Start Family Hub Approach.

Best Start Family Hubs in Suffolk will aim to provide a welcoming place that brings together health, education and community services so families can receive early, joined up support from pregnancy through the early years and further into childhood, ensuring every child has the strongest foundations for healthy development and learning.

Suffolk is ambitious for every child, and our vision for the Best Start Family Hub approach is to create a joined up, place based system where services work together to ensure all families can easily access the information, support and relationships they need, so every child in Suffolk has the best possible start in life.

PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Best Start Family Hubs in Suffolk are delivered through a strong multi agency partnership that brings together midwifery, health visiting, the Family Help service, early years providers, schools, libraries, Integrated Care Board partners, voluntary and community organisations, adult support services and wider community groups.

Partners across different organisations work as a single system using shared principles, aligned pathways and joint planning under the governance of the Strategic Alliance to ensure families can quickly access the right information, advice and support, and be connected to services that meet their needs.



LOCALITY MODEL

We will deliver the Best Start Family Hub approach through a locality model that organises support around clearly defined communities, making it easier for families to access timely, joined up help.

A locality model also ensures that support reflects Suffolk's diverse needs across a large, mostly rural county. It enables services to respond to local data on deprivation, rural access barriers and GLD inequalities, and enables a focus on outreach across community venues such as libraries that provide open access to a range of early years activities and resources which help with early speech and language development and provide opportunities for parents and carers to meet and build connections and communities.

This place based structure strengthens relationships between partners, amplifies family voice, and helps target support where it can have the greatest impact.

BEST START FAMILY HUB CORE SERVICES

Warm Welcome and Access to Information and Support for the Whole Family

Best Start Family Hubs will provide a warm, inclusive welcome to families with children of all ages, offering clear information, friendly advice and practical support so that families can quickly find the help they need and be confidently connected to the services, activities and community provision that will benefit them most. We will work in a whole family way, recognising that the needs and strengths of parents, carers and children are interconnected, and that supporting the whole family leads to earlier identification of issues, more coordinated help, and better long term outcomes for children.

Maternal and Early Years Health Services

Best Start Family Hubs will act as an integrated point where midwifery, health visiting and wider early years and maternal health services are connected. Families will be able to access advice, appointments and developmental reviews and further support within their best start family hub.

Perinatal Mental Health Support

Families can access early advice and emotional wellbeing support during pregnancy and after birth. This will include peer support and social opportunities as well as clear pathways into specialist mental health services when needed.

Parent–Infant Relationship Support

Support is available to help parents build strong, responsive relationships with their baby through guidance, modelling, and evidence based activities offered by midwives, health visitors and other trained practitioners. This promotes secure attachment, which is essential for healthy brain development, emotional regulation and early learning.

Infant Feeding Support

Families can receive advice, practical help and peer support on breastfeeding, bottle feeding and safe introduction of solid foods. This ensures parents feel confident in feeding choices and helps promote good nutrition, bonding and early development.

Home Learning Environment & Parenting Support

Best Start Family Hubs will provide practical support to help parents create a strong home learning environment, including activities that build early language, play, routines and positive relationships. The hubs will also offer a range of parenting programmes. This provision will include universal groups and workshops and evidence based interventions.

A positive home learning environment and high quality parenting support are proven to strengthen parent/child interactions and build the foundations children need for early communication, emotional wellbeing and learning.

Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC)

Best Start Family Hubs will help families access clear information on early education entitlements and local childcare options via the Family Information Service. High quality ECEC supports children’s language, physical and social–emotional development.

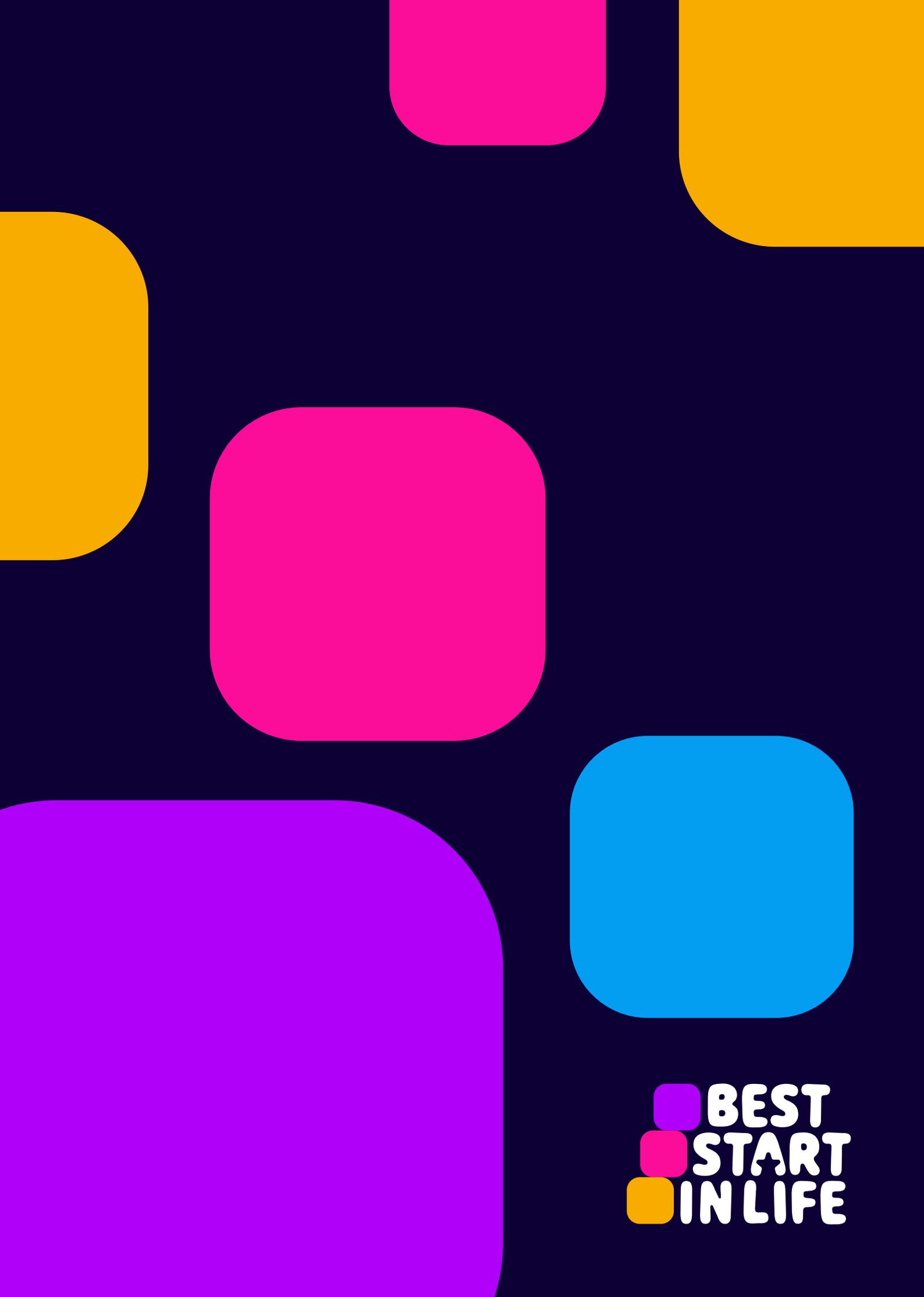
Support for Children with SEND and Their Families

Best Start Family Hubs will provide a clear single point of contact for SEND information, early identification of needs, and navigation through support pathways. Families will be offered accessible information, signposting, and connections to early years settings, health services and VCFSE organisations. Workforce development will ensure inclusive practice across all services, supported by increased resource within Family Hubs to deliver early, coordinated support in line with the national SEND reforms and the drive for more timely identification, assessment and joined-up help for children and families.

INITIAL DELIVERY TIMELINE

Month	Focus
1	Mobilise family and community engagement mechanisms; begin awareness and access improvements; further development of shared workforce principles.
2	Begin work on Outcomes Framework design; aligned with GLD data analysis.
3	Start scaling evidence based interventions; strengthen Speech Language and Communication Needs assessment pathways (WellComm), scale EasyPeasy and Solihul.
5	Inequality focused planning; continue pathway strengthening across health, early years and SEND.
6	Develop monitoring systems for access and impact; review learning gathered; refine Best Start model accordingly.





 **BEST**
 **START**
 **IN LIFE**