



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

Thursday 16 July 2026

Best Start in Life Plan 2026-2028

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Shirley Reynolds, Cabinet Member: Children, Young People, Education, Employment and Skills
Lead Director:	Helen Onions, Director of Public Health Darren Knibbs, Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support Rebecca Carey, Interim Director: Education & Skills
Service Area:	Children Services and Public Health
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Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	Key Decision
Forward Plan:	Yes - 14.05.2026
Report considered by:	SMT - 16.06.2026 Business Briefing - 25.06.2026 Cabinet - 16.07.26

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1.1 approve the Telford & Wrekin Best Start in Life Plan 2026-2028, which has the aspiration that every five-year-old in the borough reaches their development potential.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to introduce the Best Start in Life Plan, which all LAs are expected to publish for the first time in 2026. This partnership plan has been

developed across council teams, local NHS organisations and voluntary and community sector (VCSE) partners.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Department for Education published the new strategy [Giving every child the best start in life](#) in July 2025, as part of the Government's [Opportunity Mission](#). Local Best Start Delivery Plans are expected to build on existing local Children & Young People's strategies, and should:

- Set a bold vision for improving child development and health outcomes with local delivery across partners, including: children's services, nurseries, childminders, schools, health services, local voluntary and community groups;
- Identify the local needs of babies, children and families, set out plans to address gaps in provision and scale innovative practice.

The DfE expects local plans to describe how delivery actions will be: carried out in partnership, tracked and tailored to local needs to continually drive progress.

3.2 Our Council Plan and Health & Wellbeing Strategy both highlight the importance of all Telford & Wrekin children getting the best start in life, to ensure they have maximum opportunities throughout their lives. Our [Children and Young People's Strategy](#) aims to ensure that all our children and young people - *start well, stay well, keep safe, and enjoy and achieve*. Becoming a Child Friendly Borough, a key part of the strategy commitments, is strengthened by this focus on the best start in life.

3.3 Healthy pregnancy, support for families in the early years and early years education are all fundamental building blocks to ensuring our children experience the best physical, cognitive and emotional development possible. Certain parents and children face disadvantage for different reasons, including; experience of care, poverty, having global majority ethnic backgrounds, and being affected by drugs and alcohol and domestic abuse. Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) often require focussed attention to ensure they reach their full potential.

3.4 Good Level of Development (GLD) is a measure used to determine whether children are working at the expected level for their age by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (Reception year). Children's development at the end of Reception Year, is measured in school through 12 Early Learning Goals in the following 5 areas:

- **Communication and Language:** Listening, Attention and Understanding, Speaking;
- **Physical Development:** Gross Motor Skills and Fine Motor Skills;
- **Personal, Social and Emotional Development:** Self-Regulation, Managing Self, Building Relationships;
- **Literacy:** Comprehension, Word Reading, Writing;
- **Mathematics:** Numbers, Numerical Patterns.

3.5 The Government's ambition is that 75% of 5-year-olds in England will have a good level of development by 2028. Improving Good Level of Development is also a key regional Department of Health and Social Care priority, and is included in the Midlands Director of Public Health *Critical Six for 2026*. In August 2025 all local

authorities were allocated individual targets by the Department for Education (DfE) to improve good level of development outcomes in 5-year-olds by 2028.

- 3.6 The National Centre for Family Hubs, hosted and delivered by the Local Government Association, has offered support to local authorities to develop their best start plans in collaboration with Nesta, the UK innovation agency for social good.

4.0 Summary of main proposals

- 4.1 The Good Level of Development outcome in 5-year-olds is part of the Council's performance monitoring process and is also incorporated in the Health & Wellbeing Board and Children & Young People's Strategy outcomes frameworks. The GLD measure is included in the newly published Local Outcomes Framework.
- 4.2 In 2024/25 67.3% of 5-year-olds in Telford & Wrekin achieved a good level of development, and the DfE have assigned an overall local target of 78% for 2027/28. This local target increase expected for Telford & Wrekin is 11% over the next three years. This stretch target is higher than the average across all local authorities, which is 7% increase. Our target translates into an additional 235 5-year-olds expected to achieve a good level of development in 2027/28.
- 4.3 Data profiling work on Telford & Wrekin 5 year olds achieving a good level of development in 2024/25, indicates our target groups of children who are less likely to achieve a good level of development are: boys, children born in the summer and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, for example children receiving free school meal.
- 4.4 The DfE has also set local authorities inequalities target for pupils receiving Free School Meal (FSMs). In 2024/25 50.6% of Telford & Wrekin 5-year-olds receiving FSMs achieved a good level of development, and our target for 2027/28 is 64.6%. This translates into an additional 62 5-year-olds receiving Free School Meals achieving a good level of development in 2027/28.
- 4.5 The [Telford & Wrekin CYP Strategy](#), approved by Cabinet in February 2025, provides the local strategic context for our best start in life plan. Given the broad scope and context of achieving a good level of development, the partnership and ownership for the agenda spreads across the council and beyond. Work on the best start in life agenda with the NHS, through; health visiting, school nursing, dental health, speech and language therapy and SEND, strongly aligns with the neighbourhood health shift, which is part of the delivery of the NHS 10-year plan.
- 4.6 The national SEND reforms, set out in the Thrive and Achieve White Paper, will be progressively implemented in Telford & Wrekin ensuring the sharing of commitments for both agendas. Within the Best Start in Life Plan, the alignment with SEND reform will be delivered through shared actions across education and health and care partners. This should ensure an integrated early years approach is embedded, which prioritises early identification, provides a consistent graduated response and timely access to specialist support for children who need it.
- 4.7 Healthy Babies and Best Start Family Hubs services are funded by the Government as part of the best start in life priority. Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Children & Family Support Team deliver Family Hubs (FHs) services in the borough. All Family Hubs are expected to include the following core "strands" as part of the service offer, which is tightly defined by the DfE:

- Perinatal Mental Health and Parent–Infant Relationships
- Infant Feeding Support – from Health Visiting and community peer supporters
- Parenting Support - antenatal education and targeted support
- Home Learning Environment – support for pre-schoolers
- Healthy Babies Offer publication for families covering first 1,001 days families
- Parent & Carer Panels – to ensure family voices shape service design
- Wider Services –VCSE, reducing parental conflict, domestic abuse etc.
- Children with additional needs (a new strand from 2026)

- 4.8 The parenting support, home learning environment and new children with additional needs Family Hubs strands are the elements of the overall offer which most closely support children to achieve good level of development. The DfE specifies which evidence-based interventions can be funded through the local authority Family Hubs grant for these strands. The DfE expects local authorities to submit costed delivery plans across the stands.
- 4.9 The Council's Early Years and Childcare Team delivers the Family Hubs home learning environment strand as part of their role, which includes: managing childcare sufficiency, delivery of Wrap Around and Healthy Active Holidays programmes, and support, advice and guidance to Early Years Foundation Stage settings.
- 4.10 The interventions currently delivered in Telford & Wrekin across Family Hubs and Early Years settings, which are specified [DfE Evidence-Based Interventions](#) are for:
- Parenting: Triple P Group Work, Stepping Stones. Triple P for Baby Online
 - Home Learning Environment: Early Talk Boost, Making it REAL, Triple P – Stepping Stones.
- 4.11 The Telford & Wrekin best start in life working group, established in September 2025 has been meeting regularly to develop the delivery plan using DfE and Nesta guidance and support resources. The working group includes colleagues from public health, education, family hubs and Health Visiting and Speech and Language leads from Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust.
- 4.12 Our Best Start in Life Plan framework is shown below, and the plan includes a series of detailed actions owned across the partnership.



- 4.13 Given the wide partnership collaboration and ownership required on this agenda, the governance and reporting of this Best Start in Life plan will include: SMT and Cabinet, Safeguarding Children Board, Health & Wellbeing Board and Telford & Wrekin Integrated Place Partnership and the Education Strategic Partnership.
- 4.14 The first iteration of the best start in life plan was published on 31 March 2026, which was a DfE requirement. The plan has now been updated and refreshed and many actions are now being delivered, key examples of progress across the plan's framework headings include:
- **Maximising the 2-2.5 year checks by Health Visitors:** text message reminders for parents for 2–2.5 year developmental appointments and the expansion of Health Visitor baby weigh-in drop-in clinics across the borough.
 - **Develop and raise awareness of our universal offer:** the [Best Start and Family Hubs youth and community offer](#) is now fully operational, supporting families across the borough with: parenting guidance, parent-infant relationship support, financial advice, and school readiness, evidenced by strong engagement including 35,000 website visits.
 - **Expand targeted support:** new roles have been agreed such as Best Start Inclusion Practitioners, which will support families where children have emerging developmental needs or SEND, providing early, practical interventions, to help parents navigate local support pathways, and coordinate with nurseries and health visitors to ensure equal access to services.
 - **Become data and intelligence-led:** development of the best start in life needs assessment, including tracking of good level of development achievement in individual children from early years settings into reception.
 - **Improve engagement and participation:** Dandelion Parents have supported the production of the video and communications to parents, and insight and support from PODS is shaping the Family Hubs offer and SEND reform plans.
 - **Speech, Language and Communication pathways:** Early years practitioners are implementing Talk Boost and Making it Real interventions, evidencing clear impact in settings and supporting families to extend their children's learning at

home. The DfE Early Years Foundation Stage Programme sessions started to be delivered to early years foundation stage leads in Telford & Wrekin in May. Notifications from NHS staff, like Health Visitors are being used more effectively to identify SEND needs earlier, and support timely transition into reception.

5.0 Alternative Options

- 5.1 None, the DfE expects all local authorities to work in partnership to develop best start in life delivery plans in order to deliver the local targets which have been nationally set.

6.0 Key Risks

- 6.1 Improving childhood development has lifetime health and social economic benefits. Family Hubs and Health Visiting are funded through local authority grants from Government and the best start in life offer being developed would be at risk without these vital funding streams.

7.0 Council Priorities

- 7.1 Every child, young person and adult lives well in their community.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 The Best Start in Life Plan will be delivered primarily through a combination of existing base budget and external funding streams, including Government grant funding for Family Hubs and the Healthy Child Programme (HCP).
- 8.2 The Healthy Child Programme has an ongoing budget allocation of £3.3m per annum, funded through the Public Health Grant.
- 8.3 Family Hubs grant funding from the Department for Education commenced in 2022/23, with Telford & Wrekin receiving £4.2m up to and including the 2025/26 financial year. Further funding through the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies programme has been confirmed for the period 2026/27 to 2028/29, with a maximum allocation of £5.33m over the three years. This is supplemented by an annual Council contribution of £0.7m to support delivery.
- 8.4 The Council remains reliant on these external funding streams to sustain delivery of the programme. Should the grant funding referenced in sections 8.2 and 8.3 reduce or cease, the Council would need to review the scope and affordability of the Best Start in Life offer, as the current delivery model would not be sustainable without this funding.

9.0 Legal and HR Implications

- 9.1 Following the policy paper 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life' the Best Start in Life Plan follows the requirement for Children and Young People's strategies under the Children Act 1989 (as amended) and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008. SEND provision is addressed in the SEND Code of Practice (January 2015) and Children and Families Act 2014 with health responsibilities under the NHS Act 2006 and joint commissioning under the Health and Care Act 2022. Education duties are addressed under the Education Act 1996 and with additional regard to the EYFS Statutory Framework. Overarching consideration should be given to the Best Start Family Hubs and Health Baby Guidance (2025-26) on implementation.

10.0 Ward Implications

- 10.1 Borough-wide impact, but particularly wards with highest levels socio-economic deprivation.

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

- 11.1 Children's early years are crucial to their development, health and life chances. Starting Well is a Health & Wellbeing Strategy priority and taking a life course approach is also critical for tackling inequalities. Improving good level of development at the end of reception is a key local and national goal, for health but also for social and economic reasons given its relationship to educational attainment, employment and economic opportunity. The national and local GLD targets are part of Government's Opportunity Mission.

12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 12.1 [National research](#) shows there are obvious variations in the Good Level of Development in children at 2-2.5 years in children across protected characteristics, such as gender and ethnicity, and these inequalities are known to persist at age 5 and beyond for future educational attainment.

13.0 Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

- 13.1 None

14.0 Background Papers

None

15.0 Appendices

Appendix A Telford & Wrekin Best Start in Life Plan 2026 -2028 (June 2026)

16.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Director	09/06/2026	03/06/2026	HO
Legal	09/06/2026	16/06/2026	ON
Finance	09/06/2026	18/06/2026	PT