

Luton's Best Start in Life Plan 2026 - 2029



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1. Our Vision

Every child in Luton to grow up healthy, supported, and able to reach their full potential.

Working collectively across Luton Council, Public Health, Children and Families, Early Years, Family Help, Family Hubs, Flying Start, NHS Health Services and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector, we will strengthen the early years system so that all children, especially those who need us most benefit from high quality, inclusive and accessible support in the first five years of their life. By making the health and wellbeing of our youngest children a shared responsibility across the whole system and within our communities, we will help create a fairer, healthier and brighter future, aligned with the Luton 2040 ambition.

We will improve early development outcomes by increasing the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD). Current GLD stands at 64% overall and 52% for disadvantaged children. By 2028, our ambition is to exceed 71% GLD overall and 62.7% for children eligible for free school meals (FSM), narrowing the gap in GLD between children eligible for FSM and those not eligible for FSM, ensuring every child has the best start in life.

2. Our Mission

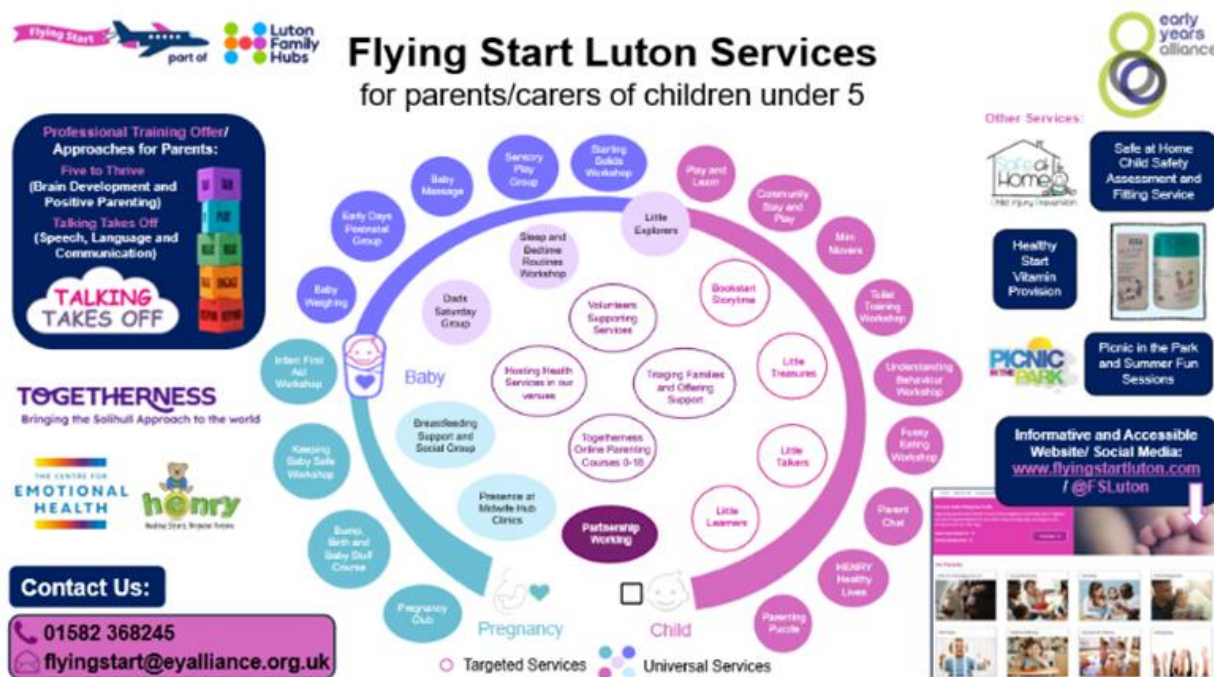
Our mission is to enhance our early years in Luton so that every child regardless of background, family circumstance or postcode has the support, opportunities and strong foundations they need to thrive.

To achieve this, we will work with partners and communities to provide high quality, accessible and inclusive services from pregnancy to age five, with a strong focus on prevention, early intervention and reducing inequalities.

We are committed to empowering families, strengthening relationships and ensuring children experience safe, nurturing environments that promote healthy development. Through collaboration across Health, Education, Early Years, Family Help and VCSFE partners, we will build a seamless, joined up offer that meets the needs of our youngest children and those who care for them. With shared leadership, partnership working and a relentless focus on improving outcomes, we will raise the Good Level of Development for all children in Luton and reduce the gaps to give every child in Luton the best possible start in life

3. Our Story

When we talk about giving Luton children the best start in life, we are not starting from scratch. We are building on a long, proud history rooted in partnership, evidence and a deep understanding of our communities. That journey began with Flying Start, Luton's pregnancy-to-five strategy. Flying Start was established to improve outcomes from a child's conception to the age of five, and over time Flying Start has become a familiar and trusted part of our town's early years offer.



What has always mattered most is not just the model of how Flying Start delivers services, but the people behind it; Early Year Practitioners who know Luton, who work alongside our culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and who families recognise as safe, welcoming and on their side. Before Flying Start, many local families benefited from Sure Start Children's Centres that helped shape early years services in Luton. Flying Start built on what worked, updated the approach and sharpened our focus on early intervention and prevention as a more effective approach to early year service provision. As family needs have changed, and national policy has shifted towards more integrated support, we took the next step to even better service provision for young children and their families.

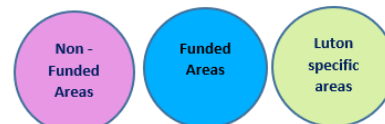
In 2022 Luton was one of 75 local authorities receiving transformation funding to become an early adopter of the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. Bringing together early years and wider family support under a single, more joined up offer and created an integrated health and care service offer around children and families,

4. Our Family Hub Network and partners

partners



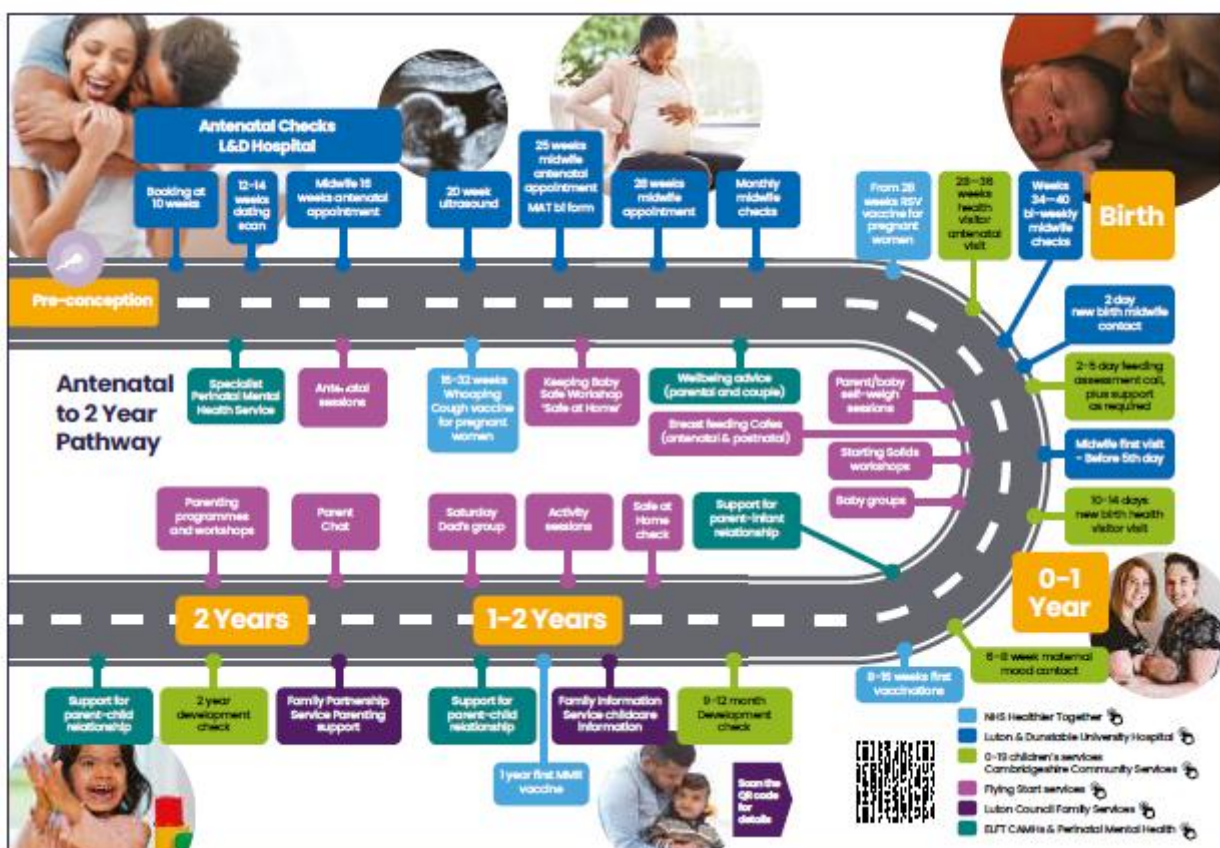
The diagram illustrates the 'Luton Parenting Support' hub, a central red circle with an icon of a hand holding three stylized figures. This hub is surrounded by numerous other circles, each representing a different service or organization. The circles are color-coded: red for the central hub, blue for 'Perinatal & Parent infant relations' and 'Parent Carer Panel', orange for 'HLE & Early Language', and various shades of green, pink, and purple for the other services. The services include: 'Infant Feeding', 'Perinatal & Parent infant relations', 'Reducing Parental Conflict', 'Total Wellbeing Luton', 'Speech Language and Communication', 'HAF Enigise Luton', 'Pre-conception (Genetics)', 'Community Networks', 'Luton Sexual Health', 'Workforce Development', 'Flying Start/ EYA', 'Early Years settings', 'Nutrition & Weight', 'Family Information Service', 'NSPCC', 'Youth Partnership Service & Youth Council', 'Youth Network', 'Voluntary Sector & Faith Settings', 'Leisure & Libraries: Active Luton', 'Schools & Education', 'Families First for Children: Family Help', 'SEND Local Offer', 'BSFH app & website', 'Primary Care Networks', 'Children's Community Health Services', 'Substance misuse', 'Domestic Abuse Support', 'Support for Separated parents', 'Women's Health Networks', '0-19 service (HCP)', 'Mental Health Services', 'Oral Health', 'Luton Adult Learning Skills/ employment', 'Midwifery /Maternity', 'Parent Carer Panel', 'HLE & Early Language', 'Housing', 'Supporting Families Programme', 'Youth Justice Services', 'ECEC & Tax-Free Childcare', 'Birth Register', 'Debt & Welfare Advice', 'Health Visiting 0-5', 'Activities for children 0-5', 'Youth Services universal & targeted', 'SEND support & services', and 'Reducing Parental Conflict'.



A big focus at this point was the Start for Life offer (now Healthy Babies). This brought together support for families from pregnancy to age two; the first 1001 critical days, making sure every baby has the best possible start. Healthy Babies was delivered through Luton's Family Hubs and strong partnerships across NHS health, maternity and the voluntary sector, with the programme helping families access the right support at the right time. It focuses on key areas such as perinatal mental health, parent–infant relationships, infant feeding, parenting support and clear information for families.

National Start for Life funding has helped Luton strengthen these services and publish a local offer, so parents know exactly what support is available.

Our Best Start in Life offer



As part of our Best Start in Life offer, we will extend this road map to give families a clear direction of the support available in the first 5 years of their child's life.

Our Start for Life offer, and road map is translated into top 8 languages

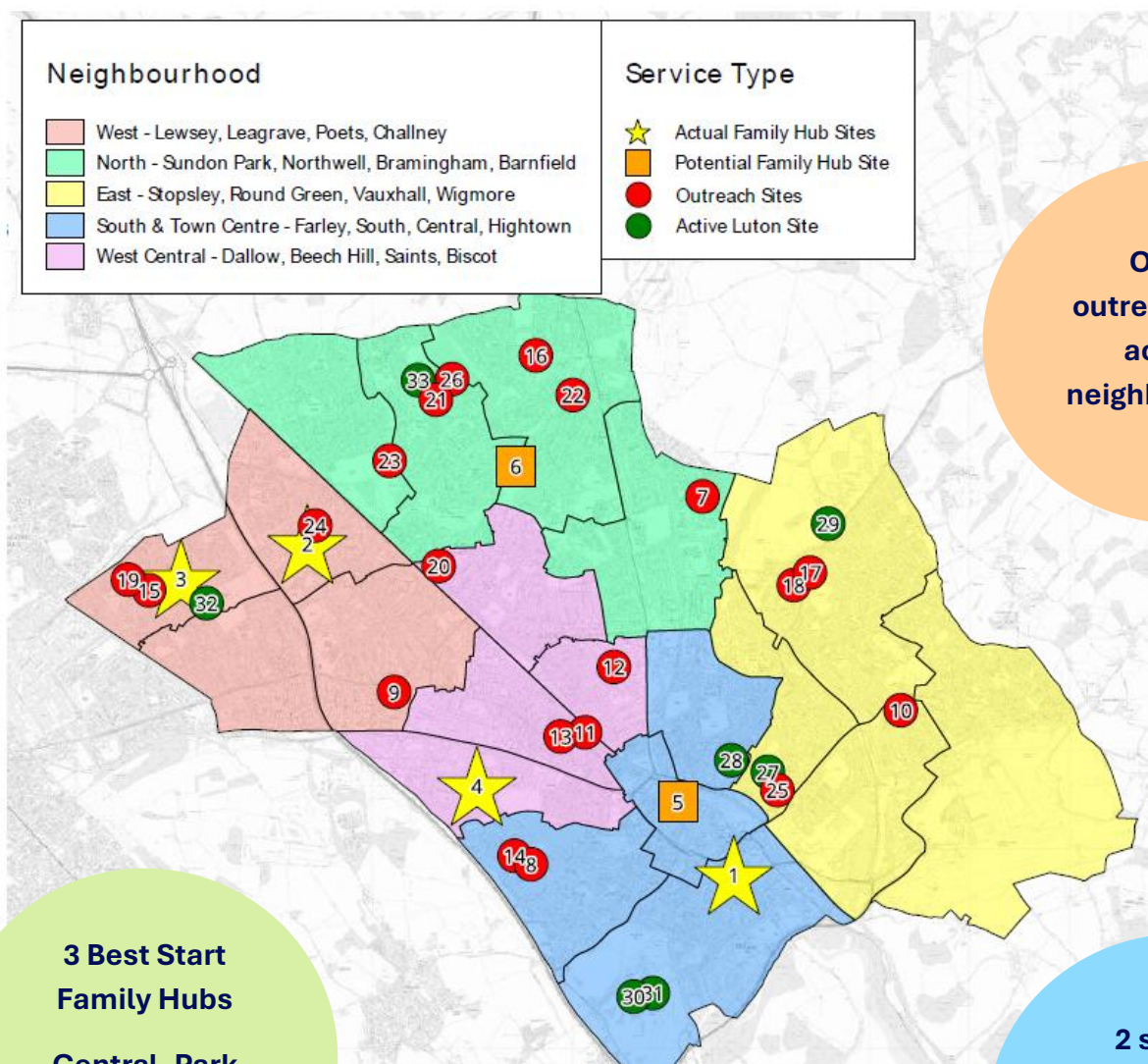
5. Our Family Hubs impact

Our Family Hubs services are delivered through physical hubs, spoke sites and outreach venues, alongside our digital offer, website and mobile app that provides a single, clear “front door” to early year services in Luton for families, from pregnancy through to age 19, or 25 for young people with SEND. Through this model, parents can reach local experts in perinatal and infant mental health, infant feeding, speech and language, parenting support and wider family help, in one place. This sits firmly within the national Family Hubs and best Start in life vision coordinated evidence-based support.



[Luton Family Hubs Impact Report 2024](#)

Our Best Start Family Hub locations, in our five neighbourhoods



Luton's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and Health Equity Town work reinforce the need for a preventative, joined up system to tackle child poverty, gaps in early development and long-standing health inequalities. Family Hubs offer the service structure to respond to those challenges and with Flying Start, this brings the relationships, trust and cultural understanding that means families feel supported whenever they approach services.

In 2023–24, Family Hubs delivered 24,695 attendances across universal and targeted Flying Start sessions. The service provided support for 4,154 individual children and parents/carers, with strong in-reach into Luton's most deprived communities.

Delivery is built on a strong foundation of multi-agency partnership from over 20 organisations, spanning maternity, East of England Community Health and Care NHS Trust 0–19, Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS), early years and the voluntary sector.

The programme is achieving measurable population level outcomes. Breastfeeding rates have increased to 89.45% at day 10 and 70.24% at 6–8 weeks, that shows the impact of strengthened infant feeding pathways and expanded breastfeeding cafés.

Health protection activity has also expanded, with 117 MMR vaccinations delivered through Family Hub popup clinics, supporting the usual GP vaccination delivery programme, and the distribution of over 2,300 Healthy Start vitamin supplements.

Early development indicators also show progress. The gap between Luton children and the national average for a Good Level of Development has narrowed, while Reception age obesity rates are now in line with national averages, supported by targeted nutrition and home learning interventions. Emotional wellbeing pathways have strengthened, with CAMHS 0–5 reducing their service waiting times from 31 to 15 days and expanding therapeutic support in community settings.

Through improved access, earlier intervention and strengthened multi-agency working, Family Hubs are now a central part of Luton's preventative health system and a key driver of the Health & Wellbeing Board's priorities to reduce inequalities, improve child development and enhance wellbeing for children and their families.

What happens in their earliest years before school, make a significant contribution to the Luton 2040 ambition of a healthy, fair and thriving town. Children born in Luton over the past three years will be the young adults of 2040.

The evidence from Flying Start evaluations, national Best Start for Life policy and wider Family Hubs research all point in the same direction: if we invest early, work alongside families as partners, and join up support around pregnancy and the first years of life, we see the biggest gains for children, for communities and for our local economy.

6. Our Best Start System

Our Best Start in Life plan brings together our journey from Sure Start, to Flying Start, and then to Family Hubs into a clear, coherent story. It allows us to scale what we know works, focus resources where they will have the greatest impact, and keep building on the trusted, culturally rooted foundations that have been laid. Services should be working together to deliver:

- **Healthy pregnancy and physical health improvement (health visiting and pre/post-natal) checks, vaccinations, infant feeding, oral health).**
- **Strong early relationships and a safe, stable home.**
- **Early language, learning and school readiness (Good Level of Development).**



7. Our Town:

Luton's demographic and socio-economic context

Luton benefits from strong place-based assets that align with the Marmot principles, which focus on reducing health inequalities by addressing the wider social determinants of health and ensuring everyone has fair opportunities to live a healthy life. These assets provide a solid foundation for giving children the best start in life. Access to green spaces supports healthy development and wellbeing, while strong transport links and a resilient local

economy help to create employment opportunities and improve access to services. However, these benefits are not shared equally. Luton is a young, diverse, socially and economically deprived town, with high levels of child poverty and a rising birth rate. These factors contribute to significant inequalities in outcomes, and this places ongoing pressure on children and families' services.

Evidence from the 2024 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the childcare sufficiency assessment shows that, while some areas perform well, there remain persistent inequalities in health, development and the wider determinants of health, particularly affecting the most disadvantaged families.

- Luton has a rapidly growing and young population, with an estimated **239,090** residents in 2024.
- There are approximately **68,236 children and young people aged 0–19** in Luton (based on ONS 2024 mid-year estimates: **35,035 aged 0–9** and **33,201 aged 10–19**).
- Luton has one of the **youngest age profiles in the UK**, with 35,035 children under 10 (ONS 2024).
- The **birth rate remains high** compared with many areas, **increasing demand for early years and family services**.
- Luton consistently reports a **high proportion of births to non-UK born mothers**, reflecting the area's diverse population (JSNA 2024).
- An estimated **39% of children in Luton live in poverty** (JSNA 2024).
- The population is highly diverse: **more than 150 languages** and dialects are spoken locally
- Luton is identified as one of the more deprived areas nationally. The JSNA reports it as the **45th most deprived local authority** out of 296 (IMD 2025 baseline).
- The proportion of lower super output areas (LSOAs) in Luton considered highly deprived has risen from 3.3 to 13.6 per cent, with the town having **17 LSOAs in the top 10 per cent most deprived**. Previously Luton had four areas in the top 10 per cent (2019 IMD).
- The 17 highly deprived neighbourhoods located as: five in Central ward, four in Beech Hill, two in Biscot and Farley and one each in Dallow, Northwell, Round Green and South.
- Luton experiences high levels of overcrowding and homelessness (JSNA 2024).
- Housing costs and low paid employment lead to work poverty and increasing pressure on families.

High numbers of young children and increasing developmental needs are putting pressure on maternity, health visiting, early education, early help and SEND services, especially in communities facing poverty and overcrowding. To make a real difference, we need targeted support in our most disadvantaged areas; culturally competent, accessible services that reflect Luton's diversity and meet families where they are.

8. Where are we now

Through our Family Hubs network, we deliver a wide range of high-quality services and have established strong foundations for joined, up working. We are committed to further strengthening integration across all services to ensure families experience seamless, coordinated support. This includes greater collaboration with our Family Help teams, wider partners, and the community, so that support is timely, accessible, and responsive to local needs.

Our Best Start in Life plan reinforces this commitment, ensuring that we use our current data intelligently to understand what families in Luton need most. By basing our approach on evidence and local insight, we can design and deliver a plan that is not only effective but genuinely tailored to ensure the best outcomes for Luton's children and families.

The current picture is that Luton's Good Level of Development (GLD) has increased by almost 3 percentage points, but outcomes remain below the national average. In 2025, 64% of children in Luton achieved a GLD compared with 68.3% nationally. Significant gaps persist for disadvantaged children, children with SEND, and children from some ethnic minority groups.

Children born and growing up in wards with lower IMD (more deprived) continue to have worse early years outcomes; lower GLD results, higher levels of developmental delay, and reduced engagement with early years services.

Take-up of the two-year-old entitlement is above national levels, but take-up among 3- and 4-year-olds is below the national average. Greater insight is needed to understand which families are not accessing their funded childcare, early education, or early reviews, and to work with those families to identify and address barriers, improving access, uptake, and engagement with early years services.

Outcomes for children in Luton continued to improve, and this contributes to narrowing the gap between Luton and the National average. However, outcomes for disadvantaged children remain below those of their non disadvantaged peers which reflects the national picture. In 2025, 245 out of 468 disadvantaged children in Luton achieved GLD. To reach the target of 62.7%, 293 disadvantaged children would need to meet the GLD, an increase of 48 children.

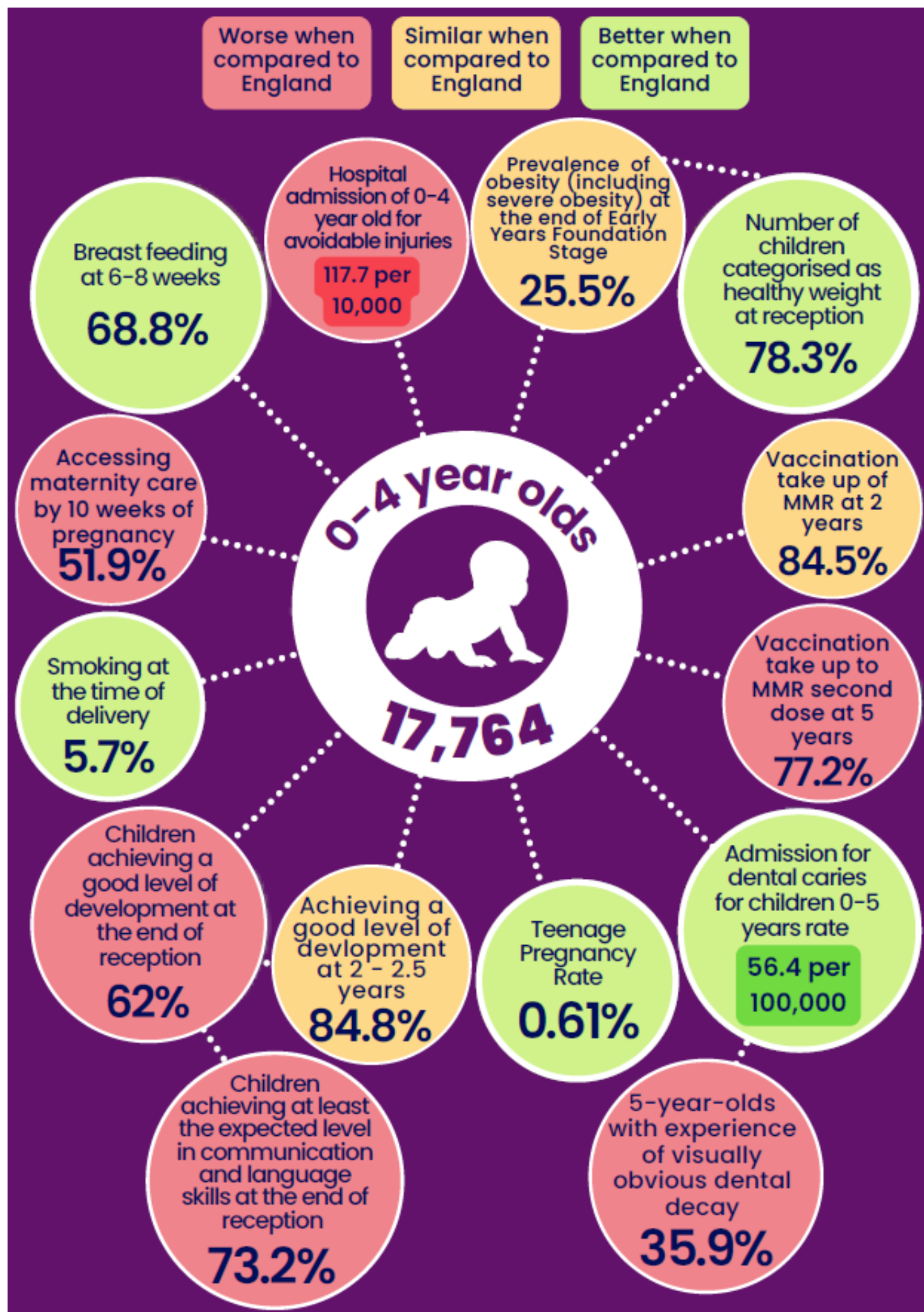
As part of this plan, we will identify, reach, and support the children most at risk of poor outcomes particularly those with SEND, from ethnic minority communities, and children living in the most deprived IMD areas to help close the gap.

9. Our key data

The primary goal of this plan is to increase the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD), improving outcomes for all children while securing a greater rate of improvement for those children living in poverty and eligible for free school meals (FSM). We must close the attainment gap and reduce inequalities.

While GLD outcomes have improved, current performance remains below target and progress is not consistent across all communities. Encouragingly, Luton is seeing early signs of improvement, including a reduction in child poverty, continued progress in early years development, more children being safely cared for within their families, and improving levels of obesity among Year 6 children. These improvements reflect the positive impact of strong early years provision, prevention and partnership working. However, children from the most disadvantaged families continue to face multiple and compounding barriers linked to poverty, housing insecurity and access to early support.

In line with the Luton 2040 Vision and its commitment to ending poverty and reducing inequalities, this plan emphasises shared system responsibility, working together across education, health, local government and the voluntary and community sector to strengthen universal provision, target support where need is greatest, and accelerate progress in closing the GLD gap so every child has the best possible start in life.



Indicator	Year	Luton	England
Early access to maternity care		51.9%	63.5%
Smoking at time of delivery	2024/25	5.7%	6.2%
% of mothers giving birth who are aged between 12 and 17	2024/25	0.61%	0.67%
Breast feeding at 6-8 weeks	2024/25	66.8%	55.6%
Child development: percentage of children achieving a good level of development at 2 to 2.5 years	2024/25	82.7%	81.4%
School readiness: percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception	2024/25	64%	67.7%
School readiness: percentage of children with free school meal status achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception	2024/25	52.6%	51.63%
School readiness: percentage of children achieving at least the expected level in communication and language skills at the end of Reception	2024/25	75.2%	79.5%
Prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity) at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage	2024/25	25.5%	22.2%
Number of children categorised as healthy weight at reception	2024/25	78.3%	75.4%
Hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries in children (aged 0 to 4 years) rate per 10,000	2024/25	117.7	93.2
5-year-olds with experience of visually obvious dental decay	2023/24	35.9%	22.4%
Admission for dental caries for children 0-5 years rate per 100,000	2023/24	59.4	207.2
Vaccination take up of MMR at 2 years	2024/25	84.5%	88.9%
Vaccination take up of MMR second dose at 5 years	2024/25	77.2%	83.7%

10. Our objectives

Luton's Best Start in Life plan sets out six key objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Strengthen healthy pregnancies and early infant development
- **Objective 2:** Enhance parenting capacity, connection and family resilience
- **Objective 3:** Improve early learning and development so that all children thrive, building strong foundations to achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD).
- **Objective 4:** Provide high quality, inclusive early years education with strong take up and accessible provision across the whole town.
- **Objective 5:** Improve child health, including oral health, healthy weight and immunisations
- **Objective 6:** Strengthen early help and mental health support for families

Improving outcomes for babies, young children, and families in Luton requires the whole system to work in a coordinated, equitable, and culturally responsive way. Across all strategic priorities, a set of cross, cutting themes underpin how services will be designed, delivered, and evaluated. These themes reflect Luton's unique context which includes high levels of deprivation, a young and diverse population, and complex family needs.

11. Cross cutting themes and aim

Luton 2040 sets a shared commitment to working together to regenerate communities, invest in people and place, and reduce inequalities. This collective approach is the foundations for our Best Start in Life Plan, enabling the delivery of its cross-cutting themes through partnership, prevention and long-term change for children and families.

Our Best Start in Life plan is underpinned by a set of cross, cutting themes that shape everything we do. These themes ensure that our actions are equitable, inclusive, culturally competent and focused on reducing inequalities across the early years.

1. Tackling Social Determinants of health and Health Inequalities

Children and families in Luton face significant inequalities linked to poverty, insecure housing, food insecurity, low income and parental stress. Addressing these wider social determinants is essential to improving GLD outcomes, reducing preventable illness and supporting long, term development. We will prioritise support in low income and high deprivation areas and work with communities to understand local strengths and challenges.

2. SEND, Disadvantage and Early Identification

A growing number of children present with SEND, yet many families experience delays, complex pathways and inconsistent support. We will strengthen early identification, streamline pathways, share information more effectively and deliver culturally competent support. This includes ensuring accessibility for neurodiverse families, families with language barriers and those using neonatal services.

3. Co-production and Community Voice

We will put the lived experiences of families at the centre of our planning, delivery and evaluation. Co-production will be standard practice, Parent, carer panels linked to Family Hub networks, alongside community groups and VCFSE partners, will shape service design, feedback mechanisms and decision making. The Parent voice will be represented on the BSIL Oversight Board and Child Friendly Luton governance structures.

4. Engaging Dads and Non, Birthing Partners

Dads and partners play a crucial role in early development, yet many report feeling overlooked. We will adopt father inclusive approaches across all services ensuring materials, appointment times, group offers and practitioner training all reflect and welcome dads. Our workforce will be confident and skilled in engaging fathers and partners as equal caregivers and contributors.

5. Workforce Development and System Integration

High caseloads, workforce shortages, and inconsistent data sharing present challenges. We will invest in the early year's workforce practitioners, volunteers, Health Visitors, early years providers and VCFSE partner ensuring they have the skills, tools and evidence-based resources needed to deliver high, quality support.

Stronger system integration across Health, Education, Early Years, Family Help and the VCFSE sector is essential to reduce duplication, strengthen pathways and deliver joined up support.

Our aim is that every family feels welcome, respected and able to participate fully in Luton's early years offer.

12. Our Strategic Framework

Our Best Start in Life plan is aligned with, the key strategic frameworks that shape Luton's ambition for children, families and communities. Locally, our work is guided by core strategies that together form the foundation for prevention, early intervention and improved early childhood outcomes.



We take our strategic lead from the:

- **Child Friendly Luton Strategy** – sets the overarching vision for children and young people to grow up *happy, healthy, safe and with a voice that matters* (Luton 2040 priority).
[Child Friendly Town Strategy](#)
- **Population Wellbeing Strategy 2023–2028** – provides the system, wide direction for improving health, reducing inequalities, and strengthening community wellbeing across Luton.
[Population Wellbeing Strategy](#)
- **Family Hubs Programme / Best Start in Life Offer** – a town, wide partnership providing universal and targeted support for families from pregnancy to age 19 (or 25 with SEND), improving access, integration and early support.
[Luton Family Hubs](#)

- **Flying Start Strategy** – Luton’s pregnancy, to, five early years strategy, focused on early development, attachment and relationships, communication, health and reducing disadvantage.
[Flying Start Strategy](#)
- **Marmot Report: Health Equity Town, reducing health inequalities** – recommended increasing Flying Start early years services and building on school readiness.
[Reducing health inequalities in Luton: A Marmot Town](#)
- **Education and Early Years Improvement Plans** – guiding school readiness, early learning, SEND support and the improvement of GLD outcomes across the early years.
- **Families First Programme** – reshaping early help to ensure families receive timely, relational, and strengths-based support that prevents escalation and improves outcomes.

Of these, the Child Friendly Luton Strategy is the most closely aligned, providing the overarching ambition that all children grow up safe, healthy and able to thrive, while our Best Start in Life plan provides the operational focus on the critical 0–5 period. Together, these strategies ensure that the plan complements and reinforces the wider vision for Luton 2040, creating a coherent, system-wide approach that places early childhood development, equity and prevention at the centre.



13. Our Best Start in Life Strategic Objectives

Objective 1: Healthy Pregnancy and Early Infant Development

Where are we now:

We are building a joined-up offer that supports families from pregnancy through early infancy. This includes:

- Antenatal support delivered through 0-5 Healthy Child Programme visits, Birth Bumps and Baby Stuff sessions, antenatal classes and midwifery input delivered via Family Hubs. Targeted pathways remain in place for young parents and vulnerable families.
- Pregnancy clubs, midwife led and virtual sessions, with Family Support contributing regularly.
- Parenting and postnatal wellbeing programmes such as *Understanding Your Baby* and *Togetherness* to support attachment and early development.
- UNICEF Baby Friendly accreditation across maternity, Health Visiting and Flying Start Family Hub services.
- Baby massage, parent and carer attachment sessions, safer sleep/infant care workshops.
- Putting together support for women to maintain healthy lifestyle during pregnancy.
- Continued support to quit smoking during pregnancy.

System improvements we will make:

- Strengthen joint working across Maternity, Health Visiting and Family Hubs Network.
- We will use maternity pathway data to target the 51.9% of pregnant people who are not accessing maternity care by 10 weeks.
- Increase targeted support to vulnerable families to strengthen early attachment and infant development.
- Embed cultural competency in all healthy pregnancy programmes.

How will we know we have made a difference?

- Increased antenatal engagement, especially among vulnerable families and teenage parents.
- Progress towards/maintenance of Baby Friendly accreditation.
- Higher attendance at pregnancy clubs, parenting and baby sessions and early parenting programmes.
- Improved maternal mental health outcomes (self-reported wellbeing, reduced escalation).
- Better early attachment indicators observed in HV assessments and programme evaluations.
- Reduction in late bookings for maternity care and improved continuity of support.

Objective 2: Enhance parenting capacity, connection and family resilience

Where are we now:

We offer a wide early help and mental health offer, including:

- Perinatal mental health support through Perinatal Mental Health Teams and East of England Community care NHS Trust teams.
- Parenting programmes such as Togetherness, Parenting Puzzle, HENRY, Parent Chat, and specialist Family Help interventions.
- Infant feeding support, Happy Baby groups, sensory sessions and CAMHS led groups for 0–5s.
- Clear information through Family Hubs, the Best Start in Life website and the Early Years Alliance Family Corner.
- Home safety assessments and equipment support from the Safe at Home Scheme.
- Community led work including Mum2Mum, Dads groups and the Dads' Conference (March 2026).
- Families First programme.

System improvements we will make:

- Develop a consistent and well-structured parenting offer across Luton.

- Expand access and availability by delivering a co-ordinated range of evidence-based parenting interventions, focusing on families with children aged 6–11.
- Increase attendance at early year services in areas and with communities where footfall is low using more effective outreach.
- Improve visibility of services within Family Hubs and build integration with both the Early Years and Family Help teams.
- Grow father-inclusive work across the town.

How will we know we have made a difference?

- Higher programme attendance and reduced “did not attend” rates.
- More families completing parenting programmes and showing positive behavioural outcomes.
- Improved parental mental health indicators, including earlier access to support.
- Increased engagement of fathers and non, birthing partners, with stronger representation across programmes.
- More families accessing early help at the right time, reducing escalation to statutory services.
- Clearer pathways with improved family feedback on ease of navigation

Objective 3: Improve early learning and development so that all children thrive, building strong foundations to achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD).

Where are we now:

Luton has strong early years foundations, including:

- An established early years network, supporting professional development and continuous improvement across settings.
- Well established early years support for schools and settings
- Strong ELSEC practice across several schools and Private, Voluntary and Independent (sector).
- High levels of take up of early years entitlements.

System improvements we will make:

- Strengthen integration of the early years system so that by 2028 at least 80% of early years providers are linked to the Family Hub network.
- Improve early identification of needs and strengthen support to meet needs at an earlier stage.
- Further investment in workforce development so that early year's providers are confident to deliver a high-quality curriculum.
- Improve the effectiveness of transitions at key points in early years.
- Strengthen the quality of the home learning environment in the early years.

How will we know we have made a difference?

- Improved GLD outcomes, especially for disadvantaged and SEND children. 71% for all children and 62% for children on FSM.
- Improved outcomes in communication, language and early literacy.
- Achieve at least 85% completion of developmental checks at the 2–2.5-year review, enabling earlier identification of needs and ensuring timely, targeted additional support for children and families.
- A robust and coordinated early years partnership within Family Hubs network that increases engagement and results in appropriate referral activity improving early outcomes.
- Children with emerging needs are identified and receiving appropriate targeted support.

Objective 4: High, Quality, Inclusive Early Years Education Across the Town

Where are we now:

Luton's early years education landscape is strong and provides a solid foundation for improvement:

- Good availability of high-quality early years provision across the town.
- A diverse early year's ecosystem, including childminders, PVIs, maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in schools, offering families a range of provision across the town.

- Home based education programme for children with complex SEND and their families.
- Additional resourced provision for children with complex needs.

System improvements we will make:

- Further improve the quality and capacity of early years education particularly in our most deprived neighbourhoods.
- Strengthen inclusion and support children with low level and emerging concerns as well as those with complex needs.
- Through the involvement of Best Start Inclusion Practitioners (BSIPs), we will strengthen early identification of children with additional needs and provide timely, tailored support to families to improve outcomes.
- Support the professional development of early years providers to develop their confidence to identify and meet the needs of all children.

How will we know we are making a difference?

- Increased percentage of high-quality settings particularly in our most deprived neighbourhoods.
- Better identification of children who need targeted support and timely access to appropriate services.
- More families accessing suitable childcare to meet their needs.

Objective 5: Child Health, Oral Health, Healthy Weight and Immunisation

Where are we now:

We continue to improve early health outcomes through:

- Almost 90% of early years settings in our most deprived areas registered for supervised toothbrushing.
- Established Growing Healthy Families is a programme in Luton that supports early-years settings to promote healthy lifestyles by improving nutrition, increasing physical activity, and encouraging good oral health for young children across priority settings.
- Improved health and development reviews, with uptake to 81% at 2–2.5-year checks, through recent QI work.
- Promotion of healthy routines, physical activity and early healthy weight.

- Ensuring parents have a Safe at Home safety check and free home safety equipment fitted where eligible.
- Provide workshops for parents on topics such as sleeping, starting solids, fussy eaters which promotes nutrition and wellbeing.

System improvements we will make:

- Increase MMR vaccine uptake Local target for 2 dose coverage is 82% at the age of 5.
- Sustain the improved uptake of the two-year health and development review for earlier identification of developmental needs.
- Strengthen targeted oral health, active play and early prevention obesity work.

How will we know we are making a difference?

- Improved immunisation rates, reducing the gap between Luton and national and regional averages.
- Reduction in dental decay among under 5s.
- More children receiving 2–2.5-year checks, with timely referrals to Family First or SEND pathways.
- Improved healthy weight measures, physical activity participation and family health routines.
- Reduced accidents in the home.

Objective 6: Strengthen early help and mental health support for families

Where we are now:

- Luton has an established early help model with Family Help Pods operating in every neighbourhood, providing coordinated local responses to need.
- The partnership benefits from a single Front Door (MASH), ensuring consistent triage, safeguarding oversight, and streamlined decision-making.
- The recent 'Good' Ofsted rating reflects the strength of our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and the effectiveness of our early help pathways.
- Family Help Pods are embedded in and working alongside schools across the town, providing accessible support routes for children and families.

System improvements we will make:

- A fully integrated Family Hubs system, where early help, mental health support, and wider family services operate as a single, seamless offer.
- Stronger strategic alignment and engagement with Early Years settings, ensuring the youngest children with emerging additional needs are identified and supported earlier.
- A model where families receive earlier, preventative support, reducing escalation and dependency on statutory thresholds such as MASH., e.g. Domestic Abuse.
- A culture of place-based partnership working, where services across health, education, and social care act as one system around the family.

How we will know we have achieved it

- Development and implementation of early intervention pilots, ensuring children and families who do not meet MASH thresholds can still access targeted and universal Family Hub support.
- Increased early help engagement through Family Hubs.
- Reduced escalation to statutory intervention.
- Stronger multiagency collaboration, especially for cases that do not reach the threshold of Family First.
- Improved access to emotional wellbeing and mental health support for families.

How These Objectives Support Child Friendly Luton

Across all objectives, we aim to:

- Strengthen prevention and early identification
- Improve family stability and wellbeing
- Coordinate services through the Family Hub network
- Ensure families influence design and delivery
- Improve outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable children
- Create safe, nurturing environments for learning and play



14. Our delivery plan

The Best Start Family Hub network in Luton brings together a wide range of partners across health, early education, family support, the VCFSE sector, and community organisations, creating a single integrated access point for families. Through this coordinated network with Flying Start as the core delivery partner, the town offers a comprehensive range of universal, targeted, and specialist early years services.

Families can access antenatal and postnatal support, parenting programmes, early learning and development activities, infant feeding support, SEND pathways, mental health and wellbeing services, community groups, and practical help within their local neighbourhood.

We know that giving children the best start in life depends on more than just services. It also depends on things like jobs, secure housing, the economy, safety and wellbeing in the town. If a child does not have a safe, warm home, or if their parents cannot find well-paid work, it will affect their chances of having the best start in life.



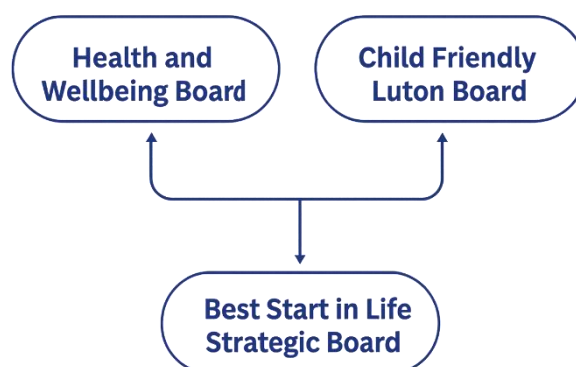
We are committed to expanding this partnership approach, strengthening collaboration with health and early years services. Our Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme known as Family Help, will further ensure that all families in Luton, regardless of background or circumstance, can easily find the right support at the right time through a trusted, coordinated, and joined up offer.



A strategic lead will strengthen and support existing leadership. In addition, a designated lead will be identified for every objective, ensuring clear accountability and oversight. Detailed delivery plans will be developed, with a continued commitment to whole-system working, recognising the importance of integrated approaches in achieving the best start in life for all of Luton’s children.

15. Our Governance

The Best Start in Life (BSIL) Plan is presented to both boards because it spans the full early years system, with shared responsibility across health and education. While primary oversight sits within children’s governance, the plan addresses key determinants of health, early development and learning that require joint leadership and accountability. Considering recent system changes, dual oversight will ensure strong alignment, shared ownership and effective delivery across both boards.



16. Our stakeholders:

Co-production and collaboration

A core principle of the Best Start in Life approach is that strong relationships and genuine collaboration across services are essential to improving outcomes. The voices and lived experiences of families show us why these matters.

One dad told us, "Attending this group has helped me to engage with my child on a playful level... I have found this to be a safe space to discuss things with other dads."

Another parent completing the Virtual Parenting Puzzle shared, "I didn't think I needed this course, but now I feel more confident and on the right track in my parenting journey."

These experiences reinforce the importance of equity, inclusion and culturally competent practice families need to feel safe, understood and welcomed if we expect them to engage.

Our commitment to co-design and co-production ensures that families are not only heard but their words actively influence the services they use. Practitioners also reflect this shared learning approach; one workshop attendee told us, *"I will share my knowledge with staff and parents... to support children's speech, language and communication."* This demonstrates how professional development strengthens practice across the whole system. Families consistently tell us that these approaches work *"The staff were welcoming and attentive, creating a nurturing environment that supported my child's development."*

This relational, collaborative model is how we will harness innovation and build sustainability by coordinating with partners across health, early education, the VCFSE sector, community groups and local businesses. Together, we will shape services that respond to real needs, target inequalities and build a more resilient early years system that ensures every child in Luton has the best possible start and is supported to reach a Good Level of Development.

Appendix

National context and legal Framework

Our *Best Start in Life* Plan is shaped by a strong national policy framework that sets out clear expectations for how local areas support babies, young children and families. These policies provide the strategic direction, funding priorities and statutory duties that underpin our local approach.

1. National Strategic Direction

We align our work with key national guidance and priorities including:

- Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life (Department for Education, 7 July 2025)
- The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the First 1,001 Critical Days (Department of Health and Social Care, 25 March 2021)
- Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Framework (Department for Education / Department of Health and Social Care, 4 December 2025; implementation from April 2026)
- Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme (launched August 2022; programme guidance published 9 February 2023)
- Stable Homes, Built on Love (Department for Education, 8 February 2023; consultation response September 2023)
- Child Poverty Strategy: Our Children, Our Future (UK Government, 5 December 2025; updated 13 March 2026)
- Fit for the Future: 10-Year Health Plan for England (Department of Health and Social Care, 3 July 2025)

These national documents define the core outcomes we aim to improve such as parent, infant relationships, early child development, parental support, maternal mental health, and reducing inequalities. They provide a consistent, evidence-based direction for how integrated early years systems should be developed locally.

2. Legal and Statutory Context

Local delivery is underpinned by legislation that sets out our statutory responsibilities to children and families. This includes:

- **Childcare Act 2006** – Places a duty on local authorities to ensure sufficient childcare provision and to support early learning and development.
- **Children and Families Act 2014** – Sets out responsibilities relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), strengthens parental rights, and promotes family-friendly policies.

- **Child Poverty Act 2010** – Establishes a framework for reducing and mitigating child poverty (note: key targets were later repealed, but the Act remains the original legislative framework).
- **Equality Act 2010** – Ensures equitable access to services and protects individuals from discrimination based on protected characteristics.
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989** (*ratified by the UK in 1991*) – Provides an international framework for embedding children's rights and ensuring the best interests of the child are central to all decisions.

These legal frameworks ensure that our local system not only meets national expectations but also delivers its duties in a fair, inclusive and rights-based way.