Child Friendly Luton Strategy 2026-2029

Message from the Board

"I am proud to introduce this strategy for Luton's children and young people. Shaped by your voices, experiences and ambitions, it reflects our commitment to ensuring every child and young person feels safe, heard and valued, can achieve their full potential, is treated fairly, and is proud to call Luton home. Together, we will continue to place children and young people at the heart of every decision we make. Thank you to everyone who contributed their views and ideas" **Child Friendly Luton Board Chair.**

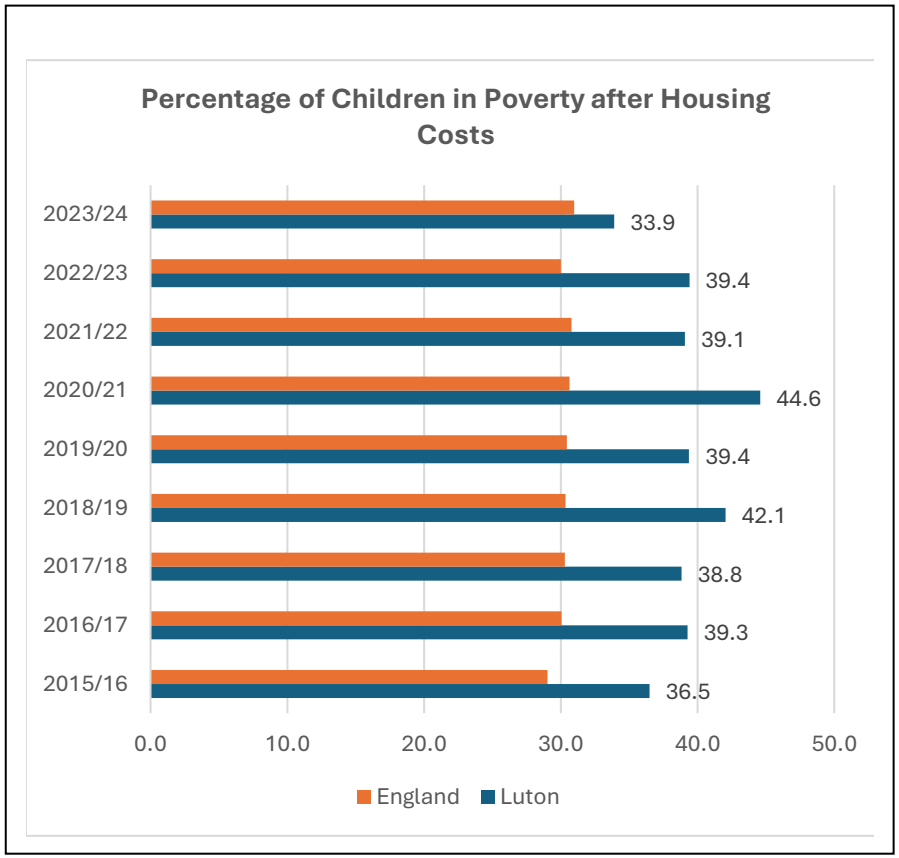


Executive Summary

Child Friendly Luton (CFL) is a whole-town commitment improving children's everyday lives by embedding children's voice, wellbeing and lived experience into leadership, services and place-based decision-making.

This strategy sets out a single shared Objective for 2026-2029, defined through five lived-experience Key Results (OKRs), that describe what success looks like for children and young people.

As a Luton 2040 partnership, The Child Friendly Luton Board will lead and oversee delivery through five Board-owned OKRs, providing a clear framework for accountability, performance monitoring and partnership action. Five multi-agency Strategic Working Groups will coordinate delivery against these OKRs and report progress to the Board. Progress will be assessed through an outcomes framework that combines system indicators, evidence and children's lived experience driving continuous improvement.



Vision: A town where every child and young person feels safe, happy, and is doing well.

Mission: To align leaders, partners and services around children's rights, voice and wellbeing, so that decisions, resources and everyday practice deliver better and fairer outcomes for children.

Purpose and Scope
Applies to all children and young people aged 0-19 and up to 25 for those with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).

Values and Principles
- Rights, participation and co-production
- Inclusion, equity and early help
- Prevention and proportional universalism
- Evidence, learning and continuous improvement
- System leadership and place-based partnership

Why a Child Friendly Town? Children growing up in Luton today are our future leaders, workers, carers, and community members, and creating a child-friendly town that places children's rights, voices, and lived experience at the heart of decision-making strengthens the local economy, supports public services, builds healthier and safer communities, and promotes inclusion, wellbeing, and long-term economic resilience.

Strengths and Progress
CFL benefits from a vibrant, youthful and diverse population, strong cross-party commitment, and clear system leadership through Luton 2040. With 94% of schools rated good or better, strong anchor institutions across education, health, social care, policing, and the voluntary and faith sectors, and well-established partnerships, the town has a strong platform for improving outcomes for children and young people. Children's Services, rated "Good" by Ofsted, reflect strong leadership and improved practice demonstrating a more stable system. Educational outcomes are encouraging, with some of the strongest results for 11-year-olds in recent years and improvements in early years development through the Best Start in Life programme.

Progress is being made in reducing poverty and housing pressures. Child poverty has fallen, and the number of families in temporary accommodation is at its lowest for a decade. The removal of the two-child benefit limit, following strong local advocacy, is expected to further

improve financial security for vulnerable families. Targeted interventions are also improving wellbeing, including falling Year 6 obesity rates, fewer children entering care, strong Family Hub and Early Help provision, and positive progress in youth justice.

Ongoing Challenges and Pressures

Despite this great progress, challenges remain. While housing instability and child poverty have reduced, too many children and families continue to experience hardship and multiple, compounding disadvantages, adversely undermining health, wellbeing and life chances. High population churn adds further complexity for services. Between 2018 and 2023, 90,000 people moved into Luton, with a net population growth of approximately 4,000. Alongside this internal and international migration also increased demand for housing, education, health and children's services, making progress harder to sustain. Too many young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET). While initiatives such as Connect to Work are important, reducing NEETs requires coordinated action across education, skills, employers, transport and community support.

These pressures are all intensified by below-average incomes, high living costs and workforce challenges across public services, including recruitment and retention difficulties in social work. While Luton Rising plays a vital contribution, sustained improvement requires additional investment, stronger system alignment, and a continued focus on prevention and early intervention.

Despite the challenges, Luton has a strong outlook for improvement through its committed partners, shared passion and ambition.

Strategic Objective Key Results Delivery through Five Working Groups

CFL through a single shared Objective, supported by five Board-owned Key Results (OKRs) that define what success looks like from the perspective of children and young people. Together, the Objective and OKRs provide a shared outcomes framework for the partnership, aligning strategic priorities, accountability and action across the system.

Child Friendly Luton Objective and Key Results

Objective: Our children and young people are safe, happy and doing well

Key Result 1: "The people around me care how I am doing"
Key Result 2: "I have opportunities to learn and grow"
Key Result 3: "I feel safe wherever I am"
Key Result 4: "I am treated fairly and kindly regardless of who I am and where I live"
Key Result 5: "I see where my voice has an impact"

Delivery is coordinated through five multi-agency Strategic Working Groups, each responsible for driving progress within a specific theme and translating the OKRs into tangible actions and improvements. The Working Groups report regularly to the Child Friendly Luton Board, enabling oversight, challenge and support. Progress is monitored through the outcomes framework that combines performance indicators, evidence and children's lived experience, ensuring that decision-making remains focused on achieving meaningful change for children and young people while remaining responsive to emerging needs and opportunities.

The following five Strategic Working Groups, co-designed with children, partners and stakeholders coordinate delivery across the system:

1. **Healthy, Safe and Secure:** Good-quality, accessible services that keep children healthy, and safe.
2. **Best Start, Good Education, and Skills for Life; named 'Education and Learning Reset'**: Every child receives the best start, a high-quality education and gains the skills needed for future employment and income security.
3. **Safe Spaces to Play and Grow**: More opportunities for development, play, creativity, and safe social spaces.
4. **Equity:** Greater and more equal opportunities for all children to access services, spaces, and learning.
5. **Voice and Influence**: All children are heard, valued and able to influence decisions about their lives and their town.

All work with children and young people is aligned to at least one OKR and delivered through a Strategic Working Group, ensuring clear ownership, accountability and coherence.

All activity is underpinned by Luton 2040 principles: reducing poverty, keeping investment in Luton, reducing churn, and strengthening partnerships.

Theory of Change Delivery Approach
Change is delivered through a system-wide, rights-based approach with strong governance, shared accountability and meaningful participation by children and young people.



- The CFL Board oversees delivery, supported by five multi-agency Working Groups aligned to each goal and OKR.
- Each Working Group develops and delivers an agreed action plan, chaired by a senior leader.
- Systemic child voice mechanisms are embedded, ensuring children's views shape all policies and investment decisions.
- The UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award is funded and promoted to strengthen belonging, participation, emotional wellbeing, and improved outcomes.
- Council and partners apply Child Impact Assessments to ensure decisions benefit children.
- Workforce stability and capacity are strengthened through targeted recruitment and becoming an employer of choice.
- National lobbying continues where necessary, including on structural drivers of poverty, such as the two-child benefit cap, estimated to lift 6,000 Luton children out of poverty.
- Digital and AI-enabled approaches are adopted to improve outcomes, increase efficiency and reduce workload pressures where possible.
- The CFL brand is used to unite activity and reinforce shared ambition across partners.

LUTON 2040
Child Friendly Luton

By moving beyond typical approaches and working with and alongside our children, the partnership addresses long-standing systemic challenges and drives inclusive, lasting change.

Delivery Model
CFL Board; five multi-agency Working Groups; child impact assessments; rights-respecting schools; workforce plan for stability and capacity; targeted lobbying to address structural drivers of poverty.



Risk Management
Key risks include funding pressures, workforce capacity, recruitment and retention, rising demand and economic pressures. Mitigation includes targeted investment, strong partnerships and national lobbying.

Governance and Accountability
The CFL Board provides strategic partnership, leadership and oversight for children and young people. An independent panel, including young people, will review progress and award a child-friendly status, Pre-Bronze to Gold.

Stakeholder Engagement
Developed with children and partners through co-design, including Luton Youth Council and multi-agency forums. Engagement continues through Working Groups and through ongoing child and student council voice mechanisms.

Financial and Resource Implications
Delivery requires sustained resources and alignment across partners, including contributions beyond existing support from Luton Rising. Workforce stability will be strengthened through targeted recruitment development in social care and family help.

Outcomes, Metrics and Review
Progress will be assessed using a Child Friendly Luton Framework, drawing on evidence, child voice, Luton 2040 and Marmot principles.

Outcomes will be tracked through a dashboard. Including perceptions of safety, school readiness, educational attainment, NEET, physical activity and obesity, child poverty, participation in decision making, numbers of children in care, numbers registered with the Rights Respecting Schools Programme, and access to stable homes and safe play and leisure. Working Groups will report on key metrics informing continuous improvement.

What Will This Achieve?

By delivering this strategy, Luton will collaboratively:

- Break cycles of disadvantage and reduce child poverty.
- Improve stability for families through stronger services and housing pathways.
- Strengthen children's health, education, safety and emotional wellbeing.
- Increase opportunities for play, creativity, cultural engagement and positive activities.
- Build a fairer, more cohesive community where children's rights are understood and protected.
- Ensure all sectors, from public services, businesses to faith groups, champion children's wellbeing and voice.
- Create a town where every child feels loved, belongs, and matters.



Conclusion

Child Friendly Luton is a collective movement grounded in collaboration, ambition and community pride through a children's rights, voice and wellbeing focus. This strategy provides corporate and system leaders a shared framework to align decisions, investment and leadership around what matters most to children, while supporting Luton 2040 ambitions and creating a town where every child can thrive.

Child Friendly Luton Strategic Working Group	Targets		Child and Young People Friendly Metrics Include:
	2027	2040	
1. **Healthy, Safe & Secure**	57.7% 41.8% 380	80% 36.6% 250	% of residents who say they feel safe (2025: 55%, metric for children required) Obesity levels at Year 6 (2024/25: 42.5%) No of children in care (2019 Baseline: 406; March 2023: 420; September 2025: 353)
2. **Best Start, Good Education & Skills for Life**	68.7% 5% < 6/11 (45.9) 2.3%	75% 1% > 3/11 (49.5) 1.7%	% of children achieving 'good' level of development at the end of reception (2024: 61% (6%< England Average); 2025: 64% (4.3%< England Average); 2028 Nationally Set Target: 71%) Average Attainment 8 (GCSE's) score: average attainment level achieved across 8 subjects (2019: 43.5; 2024: 45.0 (7/11), national 45.9; 2025:44.9, national 45.9) % of Years 12-13 (aged16-17) not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) (2019: 4.7%; 2024: 3.4%; 2025: 5.0%)
3. **Safe Spaces to Play & Grow**	47.8% 65% 46%	75% 87% 60.5%	% of physically active 5-18's (2020/21:36.8%; 2023/24: 44%) % of students who say they like living in Luton (SCC 2024: 60%) % of respondents satisfied with shops, restaurants, and leisure activities (Adult perception survey 2019: 47%; 2024: 44%; 2025: 40%)
4. **Equity**	n/a n/a 4.07% 82.66%	0 0 2.5% 83%	Rate of permanent exclusions per 10,000 pupils (2019: 0.13; 2023/24: 0.1) Rate of permanent exclusions per 10,000 pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) (2022/23: 0.18; 2023/24: 0) % of Year 12-13's (aged16-17) NEET with an EHCP (2024/25: 4.3%) % of 14+ accessing Annual Learning Disability Health Check (2024, 81.42%; 2025, 82.61%. (National Target: 75% per annum)
5. **Voice and Influence**	30/64 (47%) 40% 48%	54/64 (84%) 50% 85%	Number of Schools Registered with UNICEF RRSA (2024: 2/64 (3% of schools; 2025: 20/64 (31% of schools)) % of pupils feeling listened to on decisions about their town (SCC 2023: 29%; 2024: 53%) % of pupils aware of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (2023: 21%; 2024: 42%)
Child Poverty **Child Friendly Town**	27.5% 52.08%	0% 80%	% of children in poverty after housing costs, (2019: 42.1%; 2024: 33.9%) % of pupils who said Luton is child friendly (SCC 2024: 47%)