

**Report to:** East Sussex Health & Wellbeing Board

**Date of meeting:** 10 March 2026

**By:** Carolyn Fair, Director of Children's Services

**Title:** Best Start in Life: East Sussex Strategy

**Purpose:** To inform the Board about the delivery of the Best Start in Life strategy and associated targets

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### **Recommendations:**

East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) is recommended to note:

- 1) The final draft of the East Sussex Best Start in Life Strategy;
  - 2) Governance in place to oversee delivery of the Strategy.
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## **1 Background**

1.1 The East Sussex Best Start in Life Strategy sets out a comprehensive ambition to improve outcomes for children from conception to school entry. It outlines the local authority's commitment to ensuring that every child enters education with confidence, belonging, and an equitable start. The strategy aligns with the national target for 75% of children to achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by the end of the 2027/28 academic year.

1.2 National ambitions include improved access to early education, better quality in early years settings, and stronger family support systems. East Sussex has mirrored this ambition by setting out actions to deliver the local target that we have been set for 78% GLD by 2027/28, ensuring disadvantaged children benefit equally.

## **2 Supporting information**

2.1 The strategy is founded on principles including integration of services, reducing inequalities, and evidence-based practice. It relies on shared intelligence and high-quality data to understand need and drive accountability across the early years system.

2.2 Three strategic objectives underpin delivery: (1) better support for families; (2) more accessible early education and childcare; and (3) improving quality in early years, including reception.

2.3 Objective 1 focuses on delivering Family Hubs, integrated services, early identification of needs, improving vaccination uptake, and supporting parental mental health.

2.4 Objective 2 includes increasing childcare places, promoting uptake of funded entitlements, supporting wraparound childcare, ensuring places for disadvantaged two-year-olds, and establishing Early Years Centres of Excellence.

2.5 Objective 3 aims to ensure every nursery has access to a qualified Early Years teacher, strengthen workforce development, and improve partnerships between settings, schools, and health services. It also strengthens reception teaching and moderation.

2.6 Governance is delivered through the Local Best Start Partnership Board and is chaired by the Public Health Consultant lead for Children and Young People. The Board includes representatives from education, children's social care, schools, early years settings, the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, and health.

2.7 Three operational subgroups will each focus on one of the strategic objectives, developing and implementing detailed action plans. This work will be supported by data and impact frameworks, workforce strategy, community engagement and digital infrastructure. It should be

noted that data for early years sits across a range of data sets and systems, which presents a barrier to tracking children and targeting support. There is limited resource available to develop the data infrastructure required across partners, including health.

2.8 Funding from the Department for Education (DfE) is included in the allocations for Family Hubs delivery, which covers parenting support, infant feeding, perinatal mental health, home learning environment support and parent/carer panels.

2.9 We have also been successful in securing a very small amount of DfE funding (to end March 2026). The Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) bid supports coastal communities through targeted interventions, enhanced Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) expertise, and transition support, with evaluation based on GLD outcomes and school readiness.

2.10 The Board is asked to note that the targets set by the DfE for all pupils (78% GLD) and disadvantaged children (59.2% GLD) will be very challenging for us to meet. We have written twice to the DfE to provide this feedback and also met with them at the end of last academic year. Data for the 2024/25 academic year shows that East Sussex performance continues to be strong, with improved GLD outcomes in 2024/25 of 70.4%, outperforming the national rate of 68.3%. Whilst we are ambitious for our children, it needs to be recognised that improvement at this rate is difficult given that we start from a high base already, have seen improvement at a much steadier rate in previous years, and that investment in Best Start is relatively modest. Furthermore, the children who will be in reception in 2027/28 (when the targets are due to be delivered) are already aged 3 and have not benefitted from the additional resource and activity associated with Best Start. Page 8 of the strategy sets out the current gaps in GLD attainment.

### **3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

3.1 The Best Start Strategy provides a strong, evidence-based framework for improving outcomes for children aged 0–5 in East Sussex. Its ambitions, governance, and funding mechanisms support delivery of national and local priorities. The Board is asked to note the strategy and support ongoing governance arrangements.

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Appendix 1: Final Best Start in Life Strategy

Appendix 2: HWBB Best Start Strategy Overview March 2026