

Best Start in Life

Havering three year strategy

Havering's ambition is to ensure **every child has the best start in life**, with families able to access **integrated support early, high-quality early education**, and **excellent practice** from birth through Reception.

This three-year action plan sets out how Havering will deliver the Department for Education's (DfE) **Best Start in Life** (BSiL) strategy locally, drawing on national policy, local priorities, and the lived experiences of children and families.

The plan is rooted in a robust understanding of **local needs**, as evidenced by the **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment** (JSNA), and is shaped by the borough's vision for all **children and young people to thrive, achieve, and live safe, healthy lives**.

The DfE's Best Start in Life strategy is a cornerstone of the government's commitment to **improving outcomes for children in their earliest years**. The strategy highlights the critical importance of the **first 1,001 days** - from conception to age two - in shaping **lifelong health, wellbeing, and educational attainment**. It sets out a vision for integrated, accessible, and high-quality early years services, with a strong focus on:

- **Family Hubs:** Creating welcoming, multi-agency spaces where families can access health, education, Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND), and parenting support.
- **Early Identification and Intervention:** Ensuring that children and families receive timely support, particularly those at risk of disadvantage.
- **Workforce Development:** Building a skilled, confident workforce across early years, health, and social care.
- **Reducing Inequalities:** Targeting support to close gaps in outcomes for disadvantaged children, those with SEND, and children from minority backgrounds.
- **Evidence-Based Practice:** Embedding proven models and continuous improvement in service delivery.

The BSIL strategy aligns with wider national priorities, including the Healthy Child Programme, SEND reforms, and the government's focus on school readiness, early language, and narrowing the attainment gap.

Happy, Healthy Lives is a comprehensive strategy designed to support the well-being and development of children and young people in Havering. This plan outlines our **shared vision, priorities, and actions** to ensure that every child and young person in our community has the opportunity to lead a happy, healthy life. This plan aims to deliver on the aspirations set out in our Council's Corporate vision: **The Havering you want to be part of.**

The BSIL Plan sits within Havering's wider Integrated Starting Well Plan which is structured around our **WISH** for children and young people in Havering:

- **Well** – Improving health outcomes, strengthening Healthy Child Programme delivery, tackling obesity and mental health challenges.
- **Inspired** - Raising aspiration, promoting school readiness, extending childcare, strengthening careers advice, and supporting educational recovery.
- **Safe** – Strengthening safeguarding, improving early identification, tackling exploitation, and responding to Ofsted ILACS findings (2024).
- **Heard** – Embedding youth participation through SHOUT, Youth Council, Mind of My Own and co-production.
- **Treated Fairly** – Reducing inequalities, addressing disproportionality, and improving support for SEND and care-experienced children.

The BSIL Plan reflects the shared priorities across education, early help, public health, children's social care and health partners, including:

- The renewed **Early Help Strategy** focusing on 1001 days, SEND, mental health, and adolescent safeguarding.
- The **SEND & AP Strategy 2024–2029** commitments to inclusion, preparing for adulthood, and delivering earlier interventions.
- The **Healthy Weight Strategy 2024–2029** and **Tobacco Harm Reduction Strategy**.
- The Education Place Planning Strategy and improved attendance approaches under **Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2024)**.

Havering is a borough of contrasts and rapid change. According to the JSNA and recent data profiles:

- **Population Growth and Diversity:** Havering has experienced the **highest net increase in children among all London boroughs** from 2016 to 2020. As of 2023, there are approximately 61,295 children and young people (0–17), making up 23% of the borough's population. The borough is **increasingly diverse**, with 27% of pupils speaking a first language other than English.
- **Deprivation and Inequality:** While Havering is ranked 173 out of 317 local authorities for deprivation (average range), there are **significant pockets of need**. Around 7,000 children (one in six) are estimated to be living in **poverty**. In 2025, 32.2% of homeless households had dependent children.
- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND):** The number of children with **Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)** has risen sharply, with 2,583 children holding an EHCP as of January 2024. Speech, language, and communication needs are the most common primary need.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** At the 2–2.5 year health review, **85.6% of children were at or above the expected level in all five areas of development**, exceeding the national average. However, 22% of children aged 4–5 and 40% of those aged 10–11 are **overweight or obese**, and 27.5% of five-year-olds experience **dental decay**.
- **Safeguarding and Vulnerability:** As of March 2023, there were 530 children with a Child in Need plan, 295 subject to a child protection plan, and 280 children in care. The borough has a **strong early help offer** but faces ongoing challenges in safeguarding and supporting vulnerable families.

Havering's early years and educational outcomes are strong but not without challenge:

- **Good Level of Development (GLD):** In 2024/25, 68.5% of children achieved a GLD at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, slightly above the national average. However, to meet the DfE's target of 75.8% by 2028, an additional 242 children each year must achieve GLD.
- **Disadvantaged Children:** 55.7% of children eligible for free school meals achieved GLD in 2024/25, above the national FSM average, but the gap remains a key focus for targeted intervention.
- **School Quality:** 94% of schools in Havering are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted (2024), and the borough's attainment at Key Stages 2 and 4 remains above national averages.

The JSNA provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors shaping children's outcomes in Havering:

- **Life Course Approach:** The JSNA covers maternal and newborn health, early years, school age, SEND, and transitions to adulthood, highlighting the importance of early intervention and integrated support.
- **Social Determinants:** Housing, poverty, parental employment, and access to services are identified as key drivers of health and educational inequalities.
- **Community Assets:** Havering benefits from a network of family hubs, children's centres, libraries, and strong partnerships across health, education, and the voluntary sector.
- **Voice of Children and Families:** The JSNA and local engagement activities (e.g., SHOUT survey, Youth Wellbeing Census) emphasise the importance of listening to children and families, co-producing solutions, and addressing issues such as mental health, safety, and inclusion.

The BSiL Plan is underpinned by Havering's strategic vision: **“All children and young people thrive and achieve through accessing high-quality education provision, and are supported to live safe and healthy lives.”**

The BSiL Plan is a product of partnership - across the Council, NHS, schools, early years providers, and the community - and is informed by national policy, local data, and the voices of those it seeks to serve.

- 1. Better Support for Families** — Embed Family Hubs, targeted outreach, integrated SEND support, and a strong Home Learning Environment (HLE).
- 2. More Accessible Early Education & Childcare** — Ensure sufficient, flexible, high-quality places, transparent charging, and targeted uptake for disadvantaged and SEND children.
- 3. Improving Quality in Early Years Including Reception** — Systematic QA, evidence-based interventions and programmes (language, maths, physical development), workforce development, and Reception improvement.

Launch, expand and embed Family Hubs

- Multi agency spaces integrating health, education, SEND and parenting; phased delivery with annual engagement evaluation.

Targeted outreach to under represented families (SEND, global majority, English as an Additional Language, young parents)

- Data led campaigns and community presence to increase engagement from priority groups.

Clear escalation and complaints routes for statutory compliance

- Define/legal check processes; implement and monitor resolution within statutory timescales.

Structured Home Learning Environment home visits & resources (linked to 3 Year QA Delivery Plan)

- Dedicated post and programme to strengthen home routines, language rich activity, and self regulation, tracking GLD impact for targeted cohorts.

Integrated SEND support within family services

- Regular multi agency assessment and tailored interventions; timelier EHCPs and improved satisfaction.

Parental voice and co production embedded in all services

- Framework and feedback loops to evidence parent/carers input across plans and reviews.

Delivery of oral health & nutrition programmes

- Toothbrushing/weaning workshops with Public Health to reduce dental decay and improve healthy habits.

Map sufficiency and create flexible, high quality places

- Ward level planning; collaborate with wraparound/holiday providers and community partners to expand options.

Transparent charging & provider compliance

- Update agreements and support providers to meet DfE guidance; annual audits.

Targeted uptake for disadvantaged/SEND (e.g., two year entitlement, pupil premium)

- Data driven outreach (Department of Work and Pensions lists, multi channel comms) to increase participation and narrow gaps.

Integrated data dashboards for sufficiency monitoring

- Quarterly ward level reporting; dashboards to identify hotspots and trigger action plans.

Deliver regular QA visits focused on disadvantage, Pupil Premium, and effective Early Years Foundation Stage Profile use

- Systematic coverage and coaching to improve practice and outcomes for target groups.

Implement evidence based programmes (Talk Boost/Nuffield Early Language Intervention/Maths Champions)

- Expand language/maths interventions; track fidelity and child progress.

Workforce development on Ofsted framework & inclusion; Private Voluntary Institution (PVI) self evaluation tool

- Training on inspection expectations and working with vulnerable families; introduce aligned audit tool for PVIs.

Reception improvement partnerships & resources

- Pair schools, share effective practice, and use the Reception Improvement Offer; annual GLD tracking towards 75.8% by 2028.

Recruitment & retention incentives for Early Years teachers/professionals

- Local incentives and training pathways with partners to attract/retain staff; annual workforce reporting.

Strengthen oversight and QA systems aligned to inspection cycles

- Increased consistency, early support for new settings, and improved inspection outcomes.

For each of the three priority areas, we will ask the following questions;

1. Do you agree that this priority and specific actions reflect your experience of local needs and delivery realities? (Yes/no)
2. Where could your organisation contribute to the specific actions? (Free text)
3. What priorities and actions are missing, if any? (Free text)

At the end of the consultation, we will include the following question;

1. Any further comments? (Free text)