

**Report to the Cabinet Committee**

23 February 2026

**Wards:** All**Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme 2026-2029****Report of the** Director of Children, Young People and Families Services and Director of Public Health**Report Status:**

This item is not exempt

This is a key decision. The matter is in the Forward Plan

[005/26](#)**1. Purpose of the Report and Summary**

1.1 To inform Cabinet of the proposed implementation plans and indicative budget for the delivery of the Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) programme 'Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies', and to seek approval for the decisions necessary to enable delivery of the programme.

**1.2 The proposals incorporate:**

- An overview of the programme and reporting requirements.
- The Council's indicative funding allocations across the 3 years and the how the funding is distributed across the various strands.
- How the programme will be coordinated and delivered across the city, including governance and integration with other relevant and strategies.

**2. Recommendations**

2.1 Approve the proposed programme approach within the funding for the 'Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies' programme 2026-29, specifically:

- To accept the provisional grant allocation of £5,503,700 for 2026-29.

- To continue to place the governance and oversight of the programme with the First 1001 Days Steering Group, led jointly by Public Health and Children’s Services and the Early Years Education Board. These are both multi-agency partnerships inclusive of both public and voluntary sector representatives and will ensure Hull builds on the work of the previous programme ‘Family Hubs and Start for Life’ and adds value to all mainstream delivery of support across the early years landscape.
- To delegate authority to the Director of Children and Families Services and Director of Adult Social Care and Health in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Children’s Services and Health and Well Being and the Assistant Director of Legal Services and Governance to authorise procurement processes and the award of any contracts and make decisions necessary to deliver the programme.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 Between April 2022 and March 2026 the government funded 75 target Local Authority areas under the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme. Hull City Council received approximately £1.4m per year for the delivery of a range of activities and services including: Parent Carer Panels; Parent Infant Relationship Support; Peri-Natal Mental Health Support; Parenting Programmes; Infant Feeding Support; alongside a small capital element of funding to support Family Hub developments, including new branding and signage.
- 3.2 The current government is committed to breaking the link between background and success, ensuring that whoever you are and wherever you’re from you have the opportunities that set you up to achieve your ambitions in life. As part of this, the government has committed to raising the healthiest generation of children ever and making sure that every child has the best start in life. The foundations for lifelong success, health and learning are laid in early childhood. This programme aims to ensure families are supported in providing the nurturing care that children need to thrive. This support will be embedded at the heart of Hull’s communities and bring together health, education and community services to make it easier for families to access early, joined-up support, building on the strong partnership offer already in place across the city via our Family Hubs.
- 3.3 On 7 July 2025, the Department for Education published ‘Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life’ a landmark strategy bringing together early years and family services to improve child development, backed by close to £1.5 billion over the next 3 years. This investment will help meet the Government’s Plan for Change ambition to ensure that a record 75% of children aged 5 achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028, reinforcing the commitment to early intervention and boosting long-term outcomes.
- 3.4 The Good Level of Development (GLD) targets for each local authority are part of the Best Start in Life Strategy, which aims to ensure that 75% of 5-year-olds nationally reach a GLD by 2028. The targets are set to increase the proportion of children

achieving a GLD by 9 percentage points from 2023/24 levels. All local authorities received a letter in August 2025 from the DfE with information about their respective Best Start local targets and the need to develop a Best Start local plan. These targets were confirmed in further letters to local authorities on 17 November 2025, along with further information about what the Best Start local plans should cover. The GLD target is contained in the new Local Government Outcomes Framework (LGOF) which is to be published shortly, as a priority outcome: **"Best start in life Improve early child health, family support and early education to give children in every part of the country the best start in life"**.

3.5 The GLD target to be achieved by children finishing their school reception year in July 2028, set for Hull this is:

- **All children – 73.5%**, currently 65.3%
- **FSM eligible children – 64%**, currently 55.9%

This is a challenging and ambitious target given that over the last 4 years GLD outcomes have not moved by any considerable amount. The Best Start programme and investment is just one small piece of the system wide approach to improving children’s readiness for school and GLD figures. A system wide, integrated approach in Hull continues to be strengthened and built upon including midwifery, primary care, health visiting, social care, specialist health services such as speech and language therapy, voluntary sector partners and very importantly schools, nurseries, childminders and parents/carers.

GLD outcomes	2022	2023	2024	2025	2027/28 Target
All children	65.0	65.5	64.5	65.3	73.5%
National	65.0	67.5	67.7	68.3	
Gap to national	-0.2	-9.0	-3.2	-3.00	
FSM	59.8	56.5	55.0	55.9	64%
National	49	52	52	N/A	
Local Disadvantaged gap	-5.2	-9.0	-9.5	-9.4	
Gap to national	+10.8	+4.5	+3.00	N/A	

- 3.6 In 2024/25, nationally 68.3% of children achieved a good level of development, up from 67.7% in the previous year. The prime areas of learning that children must reach the expected level in are communication and language, personal, social and emotional development, and physical development. Literacy and Mathematics are also included in the assessment framework. Despite a modest rise in overall levels of children reaching a good level of development, these figures still fall below pre-pandemic levels. The government has set an overall national target of 75% of children reaching a good level of development by 2028, but the current trends indicate a need for continued improvement to meet this goal.
- 3.7 Jointly funded by the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care, the **Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies programme** will bring together the strongest elements of the former Sure Start and the Family Hubs and Start for Life approaches to create a more integrated, accessible system of support for families across the country. This is one key element of the drive towards the national GLD target as laid out in the ‘Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy’, with the other critical element being Hull’s early years education offer across schools, nurseries and childminders.
- 3.8 Hull’s Best Start Family Hubs (BSFHs) offer welcoming, inclusive, environments where every family feels valued and confident to ask for support. BSFHs are open to all families with children aged 0–19 (or up to 25 for young people with SEND). While universally accessible, they do and will continue to prioritise support for families with babies and young children – recognising this critical window for cognitive, physical and emotional development. For families facing more complex challenges, BSFHs will continue to help identify emerging problems early and provide access to support – ensuring families receive the right help at the right time.
- 3.9 BSFHs, delivering **Healthy Babies** services, will also play a crucial role in delivering the ‘10 Year Health Plan for England: fit for the future’ (July 2025), supporting the shifts from treatment to prevention and from hospital to the community. They will continue to provide a physical space for health services to be delivered within the community, forming part of the ‘Neighbourhood Health’ architecture, and will strengthen the delivery and integration of health services within the local community, with a particular focus on the period from conception to age 2.

#### 4. **Key Organisational Impacts**

- 4.1 Impact on other Executive Committees (including Area Committees) and decision makers:

**Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme 2026-2029** aims to continue to have a significant offer in all the city covered by our Area Committees and the activities across this programme are priorities identified across all Hull’s Area Committees. The programme leads will continue to work with Area Committee chairs

and officers to ensure communication into and from Area Committees remains a priority.

4.2 This programme also has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of our children, young people and families and giving our children the 'Best Start in Life' is a priority within Hull's Health and Well Being Strategy and has clear links into the ICB led work on 'Integrated Neighbourhood Health (INH)'. Programme leads will ensure linkage and communication remains strong into both the Health and Well Being Board and the Integrated Neighbourhood Health (INH) Delivery Group meetings. Briefings for the Health and Well Being board will be provided as requested.

4.3 Contribution to the delivery of the Community Plan, the Council Plan and/or Area Plans:

Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme delivery contributes to the Community Plan ambitions:

Ambition 1: Safe and Welcoming Neighbourhoods:

- Tackle the root causes of crime, making communities more resilient.
- Ensure that people who are affected by crime, abuse, or exploitation have access to the services and support they need and the confidence to reach out for help.

Ambition 2: A healthier and fairer Hull:

- Prevention - we will support people to be healthy, independent, and more resilient across all age groups
  - ▶ Ensure citizens receive the best preventative services which are easy to access and recognise different needs in our communities.
  - ▶ Keep children and families at the heart of our city and build an environment which supports positive health choices.
- Reducing health inequalities – we will ensure all communities in our city have equal opportunities to achieve their full health potential.
  - ▶ Listen and learn from those experiencing inequalities in our city and use this to effectively design and deliver our services.
  - ▶ Develop comprehensive and integrated services ensuring equality of access and targeted support when needed.
  - ▶ Ensure we think about inequalities first in all our decision making and secure a fair deal for Hull in national investment

- Integrated and sustainable services - we will ensure public, private, and voluntary sector services play a key role in maintaining and improving the health of local people.
  - ▶ Services work effectively together to deliver the best services they can whilst developing the workforce to harness opportunities for learning and research.
  - ▶ Recognise the impact of trauma and adversity on health and social outcomes, work to prevent trauma happening in the first place, and improve how we respond and reach out when people are suffering.

#### Ambition 3: Reaching our full potential:

- Make Hull a Child Friendly City.
  - ▶ Hull will be a great place to raise a family and for children to grow up in.
  - ▶ The voices of children and young people are heard and respected and the contribution to decisions affecting their lives is valued.
  - ▶ Children have the best start in life and are ready for school.
  - ▶ Children and young people have access to good health, education, and transport.
  - ▶ Children feel safe and protected from discrimination and harm; they enjoy well designed and maintained public spaces where they can meet other children safely and freely
- Provide high quality, inclusive, education and skills opportunities. Hull will build a culture where education and skills are valued across all ages and where parents and carers prioritise their child's learning, raising aspirations.

#### Ambition 6: Our culture, our heritage, our city:

- Young people, and intergenerational families will be at the heart of our city through the creation and delivery of activity in partnership with them.

#### 4.4 Impact on other key strategies/business plans:

The decision will also support the delivery of the outcomes in the:

- Hull Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Hull Children and Young People's Plan
- Families First Partnership Programme (FFP)
- Infant Feeding Strategy
- Emotional and Mental Health Strategy

- Early Help and Prevention Strategy.

#### 4.5 Equalities Impact Information

An Equalities Impact Analysis Screening Tool is being completed and Children's Services' recent focus on disproportionality is being used to ensure that the programme planning has a clear focus on new and emerging communities in Hull and on the needs of children with additional needs.

### 5. Consultation

- 5.1 The First 1001 Days Steering Group and the Early Years Education Board consists of partners from across the public and voluntary sector who have been involved in developing and implementing the previous Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme and are all core partners in Hull's current integrated working model for the delivery of early years support. In addition to this Hull has a range of Parent Carer Panels which focus mostly on supporting the development of activities and services for 0-5 yr olds through regular feedback and co-production activity. Learning Events and webinars have been regularly delivered over the last 4 years and will continue to be a core part of programme development.

### 6 Background

- 6.1 The Council and partners have a strong history of delivery of support across the early years and have continued to invest in Family Hubs (formerly Children's Centres), Health Visiting and many other early years support services and early years education. There is clear recognition of the importance of the 1,001 critical days through pregnancy to the age of two and understanding that these critical days are when the building blocks for lifelong emotional and physical health are laid down.
- 6.2 On 6<sup>th</sup> November 2025 the Council received confirmation from the Department for Education (DfE) that it will continue to receive funding from the Department for Education to deliver Best Start Family Hubs. This is a key part of the *Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life* strategy, which sets out the government's continued focus on enhancing early years and family services. Government also confirmed that the Council will continue to receive funding from the Department of Health and Social Care for Start for Life services. New branding *Best Start in Life: Healthy Babies* will replace the *Start for Life* terminology and will retain the focus on supporting health outcomes for the period from conception to age two. As government rolls out the reforms of the 10 Year Health Plan, it will strengthen the delivery and integration of health and children's services within the local community.
- 6.3 Hull's provisional funding allocation for financial years 2026-29 of the programme is £5,503,700 and is distributed across the following strands as below:

**Table 1: Distribution of your funding allocation across the relevant programme strands for financial years 2026-27, 2027-28 and 2028-29.**

Strand	% <sup>1</sup>	2026-27 Allocation <sup>2</sup>	2027-28 Allocation	2028-29 Allocation
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - programme	23%	£471,800	£385,800	£396,200
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - capital	5%	£94,400	£96,200	£98,100
Parenting support	19%	£335,800	£340,000	£354,900
Home learning environment support	14%	£253,500	£256,600	£267,900
Perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships	25%	£456,900	£456,900	£456,900
Infant feeding support	13%	£234,600	£234,600	£234,600
Healthy babies offers and parent and carer panels	1%	£26,200	£26,200	£26,200
<b>Total</b>		<b>£1,873,000</b>	<b>£1,796,200</b>	<b>£1,834,700</b>

## 7 **Issues for Consideration**

7.1 Programme guidance was received on 4 December 2025 relating to delivery expectations, including the requirement to publish a Hull Best Start Plan by 31 March 2026 as a delivery requirement of the first tranche of grant funding. A national webinar was held on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2025 for partners and a national conference, delivered by the National Centre for Family Hubs will be held on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2026 and staff from Children’s Services, Public Health and Humber NHS Trust are delivering a workshop on “Family Hubs and Health Partners Working Together to Improve Outcomes for Children”.

7.2 A Readiness Survey must be completed by the local authority and it’s partners by 12 January 2026 which aims to identify opportunities, risks and areas where additional support may be needed, and this will be followed up by a readiness check meeting with the DfE Best Start Team in January 2026.

7.3 Key requirements contained in the guidance, and which will form the basis of Hull’s Best Start Plan include the following:

- Development of an ambitious Best Start local plan which must be published by 31 March 2026. Plans should set out each local authority’s approach to achieving and measuring their progress towards their 2028 Good Level of Development (GLD) target. This includes driving actions from a range of partners across health and education, and wider.
- Demonstrate how Local Authorities will develop quality and capacity while creating networks of partner organisations united around a shared mission. This

should include working with and enhancing the reach of voluntary sector providers.

- Plans should prioritise disadvantaged communities while protecting successful state and partner provision. Families and children who need support most should benefit first, while existing provision is enhanced, not displaced.
- Content of the plans will include information about:
  - all Family Hubs and what they provide as a core offer for children and families from all partners
  - the trained staff within the Hubs which provide quality services for families
  - support for infant feeding, perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships in local authorities receiving Healthy Babies funding, and information available to ensure families are supported to access essential support they might need during the period from conception to age 2 (including but not limited to infant feeding, perinatal mental health, parent-infant relationships, health visiting, maternity, SEND and safeguarding)
  - outreach family support services which are linked to the hub site, supported by a locally developed outreach strategy and an accessible digital offer
  - how parents, carers and VCFS organisations are involved in shaping the BSFH offer
  - how Hull uses the naming convention Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies and ensure the Best Start in Life (BSiL) branding is present on the site, alongside local brands as appropriate

7.4 Core Services - Parents and carers should be supported to access a range of services, information and support, they need to care for and nurture their babies and children and look after their own wellbeing. In particular BSFHs should provide access to:

- Home Learning Environment programmes
- Parenting programmes
- Perinatal mental health support
- Parent–infant relationship support
- Infant-feeding support

7.5 Support for children with additional needs is a core expectation and this is already an integral part of services across Family Hubs in Hull, including speech, language and communication support, sensory rooms and sessions, parent/infant relationship support, autism awareness, SEND Family Support and much more. Further guidance on expectations for these services - including the role of trained, experienced Family Hub SEND practitioners is expected in spring 2026.

- 7.6 In Hull we are in a position of strength due to the existing breadth and depth of integrated partnership working arrangements (strategic and operational), so will be in a strong position to fully take advantage of the funding to support improved outcomes for children and parents/carers in Hull.
- 7.7 There is excellent existing work to build on and the partnership is confident that it can go further and be ambitious and aspire to achieve the target for 2028/29 of 73.5% of all Hull children achieving a good level of development at age 5.
- 7.8 The Best Start Family Hubs and Babies programme is one key element of the drive to achieve 73.5% GLD. The other very important area is Hull's early years education offer and both working together in a single system to support the child and family achieve a good level of development.

## **8. Options and Risk Assessment**

8.1 The risks associated with the programme are as follows:

- Non-compliance with programme guidance and not publishing the Best Start Plan by 31 March 2026
- The underlying financial context for the city of Hull, impact of the cost of living on families.
- The level of health inequalities across the city and the imminent changes to the NHS in terms of both structure and funding which could increase tension and result in lack of join up and capacity in key areas.
- The continued increase in the levels of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and the resulting strain on health, education and care systems.
- Capacity of the local authority and partners to deliver the Best Start Plan services due to changes across the health and local authority systems, e.g ICB changes, implementation of the Children's System Reforms via the Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme

8.2 The proposed governance arrangements and delegations will provide the framework to ensure that the programme is delivered and meets the DfE requirements and is within the budget and timeframe provided.

8.3 Programme leads and the strong governance arrangements will mitigate risks and ensure that this programme dovetails into the FFP programme, and in particular

plays an integral part in the delivery of Family Help arrangements, with co-location of services where appropriate.

- 8.4 Delivering the scheme in conjunction with VCS and Public Sector partners together with targeted in year investments will provide a greater likelihood of developing an approach which can be sustained in future years.
- a. Option 1 – approve the recommendations within this report to implement the DfE Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies programme 2026-29 through partnership between the public sector and the Voluntary Sector with targeted investments in programme elements which offer the opportunity for long term sustainability. This will facilitate sustainable investment to support children and families in some of the city’s most deprived areas. This option is the preferred option and will result in the continued delivery of a high-quality offer across the first 1001 days and early years for our families in need across Hull and will contribute to delivery of the ambitious target of 73.5% of Hull’s children achieving a good level of development by 5 years of age.

This option is the preferred option.

- b. Option 2 – do not engage with the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies programme 2026-29 and continue to deliver a local programme, subject to core Council funding only, at a smaller scale. This will continue to provide a good level of scale and reach of services but not additional core services as outlined in this paper. This could result in greater family stress and emotional/mental health issues, increased social isolation and non-engagement in community-based activity during a challenging period where the cost of living is impacting on families in Hull. It would also reduce the investment into local delivery partners including Hull’s VCE sector. Hull would fail to receive a total of circa £5.5m funding to provide support for families in need. Inevitably also impacting on the ability of the city to reach our GLD target for 2028/29.

## **9.0 Comments of the Monitoring Officer (Town Clerk)**

- 9.1 The recommendations to accept the Best Start funding is noted and supported. Once grant terms and conditions are received these should be reviewed and adhered to as part of the funding requirements. The Council’s legal services will provide advice on each project as and when required. The funding is a positive for the city and will assist in the Council meeting its objectives under the Community Plan. (PG)

## **10. Comments of the Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance and Transformation)**

- 10.1 The Section 151 Officer supports the decision of approving the programme for the best start family hubs and healthy babies programme.

11. **Comments of the Assistant Director OD & HR and compliance with the Equality Duty**

11.1 The content of the report is noted. Staffing requirements will be explored as the programme develops. There are no equalities issues arising for the council from this decision. (KH)

12. **Comments of Overview and Scrutiny**

12.1 This report is due to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on the 16<sup>th</sup> February 2026. Any comments or recommendations agreed by the Commission, will be tabled at Cabinet, for consideration alongside the final report. Sc9119 (CB)

13. **Comments of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services**

13.1 The recommendations are supported as outlined in Option 1. This is an opportunity to continue the support and care of our children, young people and families in our most deprived areas. It will provide sustainable interventions delivered through the strong multi-agency partnership that exists with and includes health and the voluntary sector. PF1108

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Officer Interests: None

Background Documents: -

## Implications Matrix

**This section must be completed and you must ensure that you have fully considered all potential implications**

This matrix provides a simple check list for the things you need to have considered within your report

If there are no implications please state

I have informed and sought advice from HR, Legal, Finance, Overview and Scrutiny and the Climate Change Advisor and any other key stakeholders i.e. Portfolio Holder, relevant Ward Members etc prior to submitting this report for official comments	Yes
I have considered whether this report requests a decision that is outside the Budget and Policy Framework approved by Council	Yes
Value for money considerations have been accounted for within the report	Yes
The report is approved by the relevant Director/Assistant Director	Yes
I have included any procurement/commercial issues/implications within the report	Yes
I have considered the potential media interest in this report and liaised with the Media Team to ensure that they are briefed to respond to media interest.	No
I have included any equalities and diversity implications within the report and where necessary I have completed an Equalities Impact Assessment and the outcomes are included within the report	Yes
Any Health and Safety implications are included within the report	Yes
Any human rights implications are included within the report	Yes

I have included any community safety implications and paid regard to Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act within the report	No
I have liaised with the Climate Change Advisor and any environmental and climate change issues/sustainability implications are included within the report	No
I have considered how the decision may contribute or impact on culture and heritage within the city.	Yes
I have included information about how this report contributes to the Community Plan/ Area priorities within the report	Yes
I have considered the impact on air quality, carried out an appropriate assessment and included any resulting actions or opportunities necessary to improve air quality in the report.	N/A
I have considered the impact on Children Looked After and Care Leavers and any resulting actions/implications have been included within the report.	Yes