

## Slough Borough Council

**Report To:** Slough Health & Wellbeing Board

**Date:** March 17<sup>th</sup> 2026

**Subject:** Best Start in Life Strategy / Family Hubs

**Chief Officer:** Joe Tynan, Interim Director of Children Services

**Contact Officer:** Neil Hoskinson, Director of Education

**Ward(s):** All

**Exempt:** YES/NO - [if Part 2 cite reason based on Access to Information Rules]

**Appendices:** HM Government Guidance Best Start Family Hubs: Development Grant 2025-26

### 1. Summary, Recommendations

1.1 This report sets out [*summarise in no more than 3 lines*]

Please indicate which priority in the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, [Slough Wellbeing Strategy 2020 – 2025](#), your report links to:

Priority 1 – Starting Well	Priority 2 - Integration	Priority 3 – Strong, Health and Attractive Neighbourhoods	Priority 4 – Workplace Health
X	X		

1.2 Consideration:

- ✓ Information
- ✓ Discussion
- Decision
- ✓ Endorsement

### Recommendations:

#### The Health & Wellbeing Board is recommended to:

- Endorse the Best Start in Life Strategic Plan (due to be published in April 2026) as a whole system approach to addressing existing child health inequalities.
- Consider the role the Health and Wellbeing Board can play in supporting the programme of work.

## 2. Report

### Introductory paragraph

2.1 The UK government's *Giving every child the best start in life* strategy (July 2025) sets out overarching aims that local places like Slough are expected to reflect in their own priorities:

#### **Core aims:**

- **Support families from pregnancy through age 5** — improve access to family support, early help and parenting advice.
- **Make childcare and early education easier to find and more affordable.**
- **Improve quality of early education and care** — in nurseries, childminders and reception classes.
- **Boost early development outcomes** so more children are ready for school.
- **Roll out Best Start Family Hubs** across every local authority by 2026 — bringing health, education and family services together under one offer.

These national aims reflect a **mission-led government plan to raise early development outcomes**, tackle inequalities, and provide an integrated support system for children's earliest years.

**Family Hubs** are the **vehicle to deliver the vision on the ground**

**Plan = the “what” and “why”**

**Family Hubs = the “how” and “where”**

In order to meet the requirements by April 26, the transformation of 3 (Penn Road, Chalvey Grove and Romsey Close) of the existing 5 Children's Centres into Best Start Family Hubs is underway. Best Start in Life Family Hubs are designed to be a one stop, community based access point where families can receive joined up support from pregnancy through childhood up to 19 years of age (25 years SEND). They combine health, early education, parenting, and wider family support into a single, integrated universal local offer. This model is part of the government's wider Best Start in Life Strategy and is being rolled out nationally from April 2026.

### **Options considered**

*No decisions required.*

**Best Start in Life Strategic Plan – to be published April 2026.**

### **Background**

2.2 Slough has the joint lowest gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged 5-year-olds (1.9 months compared to 4.7 months nationally). In England the Covid pandemic had a significantly higher impact on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and this has not improved - they are still below 2016 levels. In Slough, outcomes have recovered to above 2017 levels so are more than a year ahead of the country

as a whole in the recovery journey. Best Start in Life Family Hubs will be a key driver for this work to reduce the disadvantage gap further.

### 2.3 Best Start in Life plan

2.3 The government's Best Start in Life programme focuses on outcomes from pre-conception, pregnancy, infancy and early childhood (0–5 years). Evidence shows that the right support in early years has the greatest impact on:

- Lifelong physical and mental health
- School readiness and educational attainment
- Social and emotional development
- Reducing inequalities and future demand on public services

The strategic plan is being developed in consultation with partners, mapping, tracking back previous data, impact assessment and existing prevalent priorities that link to the councils fit for the future strategy.

2.4 There are five Key Priority Areas:

1. Early Development and School readiness
2. Access to high quality early years/family services and support
3. Child health and wellbeing (Healthy Child Programme)
4. Family support, safeguarding and early intervention (Family Hubs)
5. Long term outcomes/continuity of support (system pathways)

A strong Best Start in Life Plan for Slough requires:

#### Integrated Pathways

- Joined-up pathways across maternity, health visiting, early years, SEND, early help and community services
- Clear routes for early identification and intervention

#### Family and Community Focus

- Support to build parental confidence, attachment and resilience
- Use of community assets, voluntary and faith sectors to improve reach
- Services designed with families and communities

#### Workforce and Culture

- A confident, skilled early years and family support workforce
- Shared training and understanding of trauma-informed and culturally competent practice

2.5 Slough has identified 3 Best Start Family Hubs, Penn Road, Chalvey Grove and Romsey Close. The hubs all sit within the 30% most deprived areas within the Borough. (DFE requirement). Over the next three years, there is the potential to develop the remaining two Children's Centres, Monksfield Way and Yew Tree Road, into Best Start Family Hubs as well given their high levels of deprivation.

From April 2026 Best Start Family Hubs will have dedicated funding to develop a multi partner delivery model for universal support for families. The key focus will be on services delivered for children 0-5 years, as well as the identification and coordination of services for children 0-19 years (0-25 years for those with SEND).

2.6 An evidence-based parenting strategy will be developed for Slough, the aim will be to support families with responsive programmes rather than reactive, with a primary focus from pre -birth to children under 5 (with the potential to further expand the offer for older children in the future). The initial stages of commissioning an evidence-based programme have begun with the Centre for Emotional Health. The DFE requires Best Start Family Hubs to prioritise evidence-based parenting programmes for families with children aged 3-4years, with discretion for delivery of other programmes around the whole family.

2.7 The government has set a challenging target for the percentage of reception pupils achieving a good level of development. The Hubs will play an important role in achieving this by focusing on the home learning environment and the impact of the universal offers available at the first point of need.

Other KPIs will relate to a reduction in inequalities, an improvement in the quality and uptake of early education and childcare. Plus the number of families accessing support and their feedback.

2.8 The Health and Wellbeing Board has a critical leadership and oversight role in addressing structural inequalities for families in disadvantaged areas. Best Start Family Hubs will be a vehicle in “how” these outcomes are improved, through universal access to services and support to address these inequalities and will lead to improvements in key health outcomes. Particular aspects of this include:

- Being part of a clear, shared vision for Best Start in Life in plan for Slough
- Using the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and partner plans to inform Best Start for Life plans
- Championing reduction of early years inequalities as a system priority
- Providing oversight of outcomes and impact across partners through the Best Start in Life Governance Board.

### **3. Implications of the Recommendation**

3.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board has a statutory strategic leadership role in the local area including local health, education and social care. As documented in this report, for the Best Start in Life and the SEND Priority Action and Impact Plan this role includes:

- Ensuring alignment with local joint health and wellbeing strategies.
- Prioritising the Best Start in Life in future meetings to monitor outcomes, discuss progress and champion potential support that could be offered

- Ensuring accurate forecasting and planning informs joint commissioning across education, health and social care. With a delivery focus from Best Start Family Hubs.

### 3.2 *Equality implications*

Early childhood is a critical period in which inequalities emerge rapidly and have long-lasting impacts on health, wellbeing, and life chances. Research highlights deep inequalities in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development are already firmly established before school entry. They are shaped by the interaction of socioeconomic position, home environment, and parental circumstances. Children from the most deprived areas are far less likely to reach expected development milestones, with studies showing over 17% of children in the poorest neighbourhoods requiring developmental support at age 2–2½, compared with national averages of around 14%. Boys in deprived communities face particularly elevated risk.

Despite the very high comparative performance in Slough for children aged five from a disadvantaged background, we are determined to reduce the gap to all pupils further.

#### *Legal implications*

- 3.3 The Council and partner agencies have a number of key statutory responsibilities to Early Years Education and for children and young people with SEND. These include duties set out in the Children and Families Act 2014, the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004, the Care Act 2014 and the Childcare Act 2006/2016. Partner agencies include health agencies, Slough Children's First, voluntary/community sector and early years providers, schools and colleges.

## **4. Background Papers**

HM Government Guidance – Giving every child the best start in life  
Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies preparing for implementation April 2026  
Family Hubs Service expectations and Delivery Framework 2026