

BRENT EARLY YEARS STRATEGY

Best start in life
local plan

2026-2029





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Foreword

We are pleased to share with you Brent's Early Years strategy – this document represents our best hopes for our youngest children and their families.

We know that having positive early years and childcare experiences leads to children having better relationships and attachments with the people around them, being healthier mentally and physically, doing better academically that in turn opens up better prospects for employment and training opportunities, and being able to contribute positively to society as adults.

This plan was co-produced with families and professionals who told us how much they valued the services available. Here we set out our collective aim to put families' voices at the heart of what we do to deliver an early years offer that meets the diverse needs of our Brent communities.

We commit to coming together as agencies, becoming more than the sum of our parts, to support more children and families. We are aware of the impact of embedded disadvantage and the day-to-day strains that families can experience. We will look to implement innovative approaches, working as partners and with families, to mitigate this impact and enable families to be aware of and have access to, high quality services that will improve life chances.

Together with our partners, including the voluntary and community sector in Brent we want to continue to build trusting relationships that will enable families to thrive. We know that 0-5 is an age of opportunity and this strategy outlines how we will transform our offer for Brent's youngest children and their families.



Cllr Gwen Grahl

Lead Member for Children's Services,
Education and Employment



Cllr Neil Nerva

Lead Member for Adult Social Care,
Public Health & Leisure



Executive Summary

The Brent Early Years strategy and Best Start in Life (BSIL) Local Plan 2026–2029 responds to the significant opportunities and challenges facing families with children from conception to age five and beyond, recognising the lifelong impact of experiences in the earliest years, including the first 1001 days and the crucial period from age three to five. Our aim is to enable our youngest children to grow, learn and develop the skills needed to thrive in school and beyond.

The strategy sets out a bold and cohesive vision and how this will be achieved:

Our overarching goal

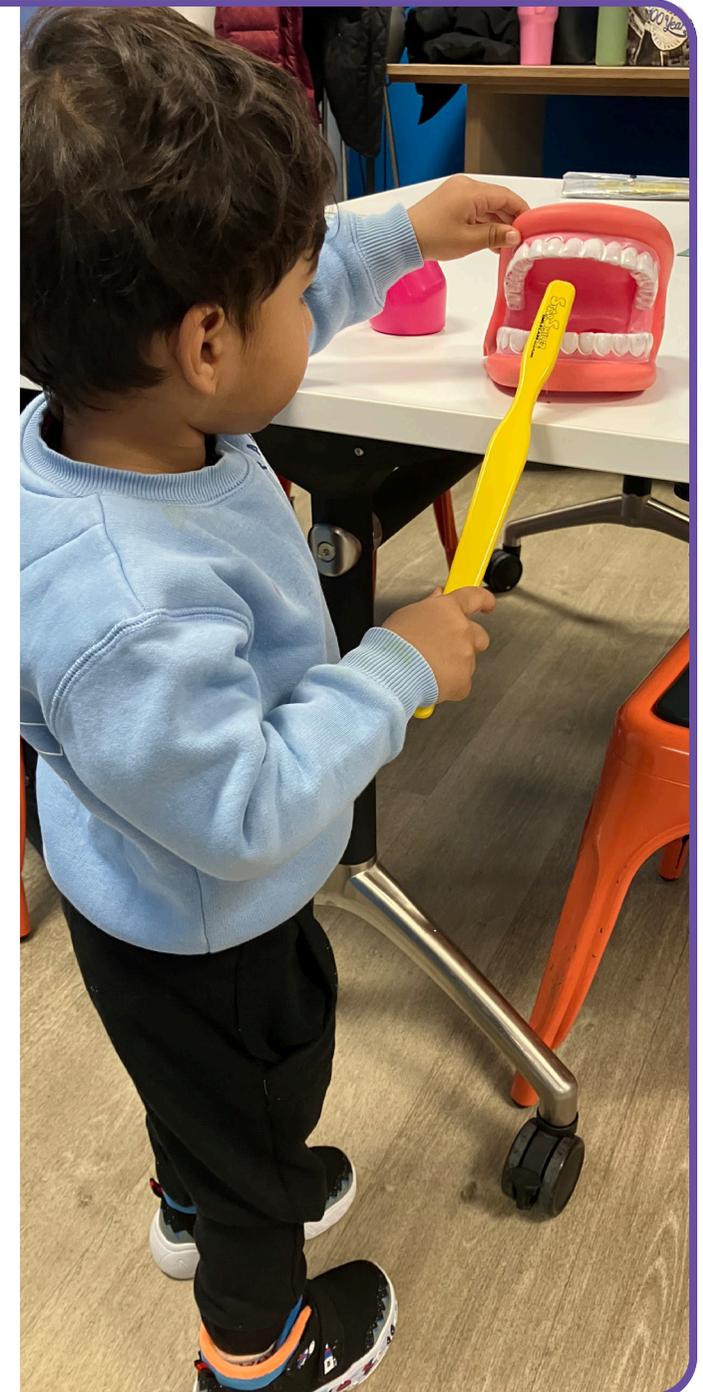
That every Brent child should be happy, healthy and safe with transformed life chances.

Our ambition

To enable a child-centred early years system across Brent where every stakeholder is working towards a shared vision, clear about their role and the impact of what they do for our youngest children and their families.

Our approach

- Building trust
- Building culture of problem solving and accountability
- Inclusive of all stakeholders
- Needs based and data driven
- Curious and challenging
- Innovative



Executive Summary

Brent is one of the most diverse boroughs in the country, with strong universal and targeted early years services, high-quality early education provision, and strong multi-agency partnerships. The borough's strengths include high new birth visit rates, strong levels of development for many children, and good quality across schools and early years settings.

However, persistent inequalities remain. Some children are less likely to reach expected developmental milestones, there is variable take-up of early education entitlements, below national average levels of vaccination rates and poor dental health outcomes, with high levels of deprivation continuing to impact families' ability to access support and create nurturing home learning environments. Some families are not accessing any of the services

that they need or are entitled to. Reaching out to these families and ensuring that they are aware of and supported to access key help at the earliest point will be a key priority.

In the development of the strategy over 400 parents, carers, young people, and members of the workforce highlighted to us the need for improved communication, easier navigation of services, better information sharing, timely support, and strengthened SEND pathways. These insights, alongside robust data



from local and national datasets, shape a strategy that is both ambitious and grounded in lived experience.

The national Best Start in Life programme requirements include increasing Brent's take-up of free early learning for 2-year-olds to 79% and increasing the percentage of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of reception year to 76%.

To deliver these and address wider challenges such as the impact on children of growing up in poverty and at longer term risk of poorer health, education and economic outcomes, **Brent will adopt a whole-system, child-centred approach, building trust, strengthening multi-agency leadership, and driving culture change across all services**

Executive Summary

supporting families from pre-birth to age five and through into later childhood. This strategy establishes a shared ambition across partners and commits to inclusive, innovative, data-driven ways of working that reflect the diversity and complexity of Brent's communities.

To achieve best outcomes, dedicated work streams are being developed around key priorities. Partners in the Brent early years system such as council family services, early years providers, schools, health providers, community and voluntary sector providers and the wider community will work together to deliver against these priorities and reduce the inequality gap between children. The priorities below respond to needs identified through our data analysis, to what families and professionals told us, as well as to the requirements

of the government's Best Start in Life strategy and Brent Council strategic priorities. The strategy will focus on six priority areas:

1. A joint commitment to system change

2. A seamless experience for families, jointly owned and delivered

3. Data that works for families and for professionals

4. A welcome from the start for every child and family - A focus on early years inclusion

5. A clear Best Start in Life pathway for every Brent baby and family

6. High quality sustainable early education and childcare that supports all children to thrive

A governance structure integrated with BSIL oversight will ensure clear accountability from frontline delivery through to the Health and Wellbeing Board, supporting monitoring, learning and improvement across the system. This strategy provides a framework for transformational change across early years services in Brent, setting out what must improve and how partners will work together to achieve shared goals, reduce inequalities, and create the conditions for every Brent child to thrive.



Rationale - why we need a strategy

Good early years services, such as maternity, health visiting and integrated childhood services such as family hubs and early years provision enable communities to break a cycle of deprivation and getting it right from the earliest stage is critical. These services in Brent help many families to lay strong foundations for their children's futures but a third of Brent's children are not achieving the levels of good development associated with readiness to thrive at school.

For children in the borough growing up in poverty, services coming together to support their families and provide the right help at the earliest time becomes imperative if the impact of poverty on child development is to be mitigated. More targeted help and tailored approaches are needed to address barriers these children may be facing in order to ensure that they can reach their full potential.

In Brent, the journey to develop joint, multi-agency approaches ensuring collective action to meet statutory requirements and child development targets by all agencies including the council, health services, community and voluntary groups and private sector partners has begun. We want to build on what works already and

the existing **strong partnerships, passion and commitment** in Brent to support and enable Brent families to thrive. The significance of this work and its potential for impact is widely recognised, not just for our youngest residents, but for their families and the wider system as these young children grow.



Rationale - why we need a strategy

This is a timely point to consider what more can be done differently to lay the foundation for lasting change in how our youngest children are supported through an early years and childcare strategy that sets out an ambition and borough-wide approach to improving and achieving the best outcomes for the youngest children in the borough, particularly considering:

- A focus nationally in recent years on the importance of the earliest years in shaping future life chances through programmes such as Family Hubs & Start for life, the wider childcare expansion and now the Government's Best Start in Life (BSIL) strategy published in July 2025
- Entrenched health and social inequalities as well as gaps in achievement of expected levels of development for some children, alongside lower than London and national averages in key metrics such as take-up of free entitlements and vaccination rates
- The potential of bringing partners together at a local level (including through neighbourhood health centres) to provide tailored local approaches focusing early support and prevention

The early years describes the age of opportunity from conception to age five, and in particular the first 1001 days, in which the foundations of physical, cognitive, emotional and social development are laid.



Rationale - why we need a strategy

What happens during this period has lifelong effects on a person's health, and well-being. Research by public health and child development experts shows the next 1000 days, when children are between the ages of 2 and 5 are also important. This window provides opportunities to build on the foundation laid in the first 1001 days, as well as helping to put children who did not get the input they needed earlier in life back on track, setting them up for school and a healthy childhood and adolescence.

Support for families during this period is essential, from the provision of good antenatal care to expectant mothers to providing the right support to families when children are young resulting in long-term benefits such as improved earnings, health and life chances. The coordination of services, to enable a universal and

targeted framework of support from pre-birth to aged five, is essential for improving the outcomes of children, families, communities and society. These will include programmes that improve learning abilities, behaviour and parental relationships early in childhood to help break cycles of poverty and reduce social and health inequalities. Research shows that the earlier the investment, the greater the return. In short, there is no better stage in a child's life in which to **focus services, if we are committed to long-term change.**

This Brent Early Years Strategy and BSIL Local Action Plan set out Brent council's vision and ambition for its youngest residents. These documents outline how an inclusive and multi-agency early intervention approach will deliver the council's statutory obligations relating to early years including the requirements of the

BSIL strategy set out below, which include meeting the Government's targets for good levels of development by 2028:

- Set a bold vision for improving child development and health outcomes with local delivery partners across all sectors
- Identify the local needs of babies, children and families and set out gaps in provision
- Describe how delivery will be carried out in partnership, tracked and tailored to continually drive progress
- Scaling innovative practice



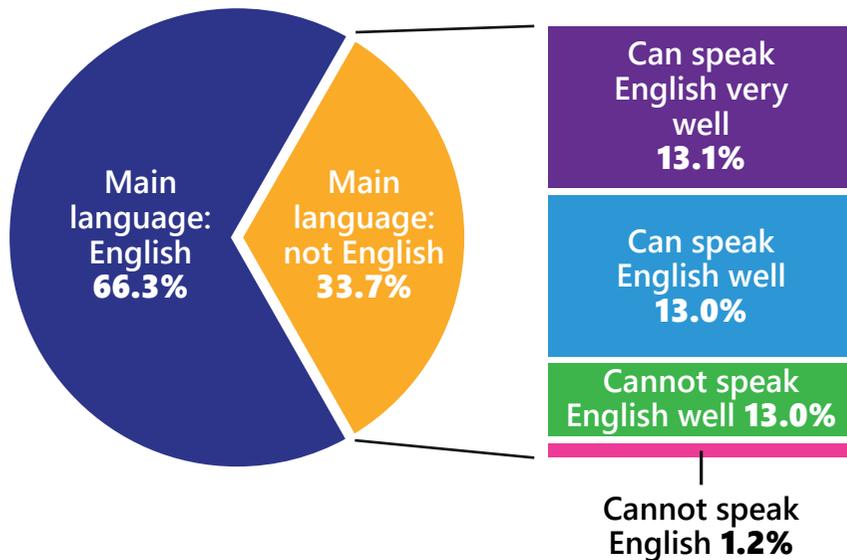
Context – where we are now

Brent has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the country with 65% of residents from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups. Over half (56%) of the borough's population were born in countries outside the UK – the highest rate across all local authority areas in

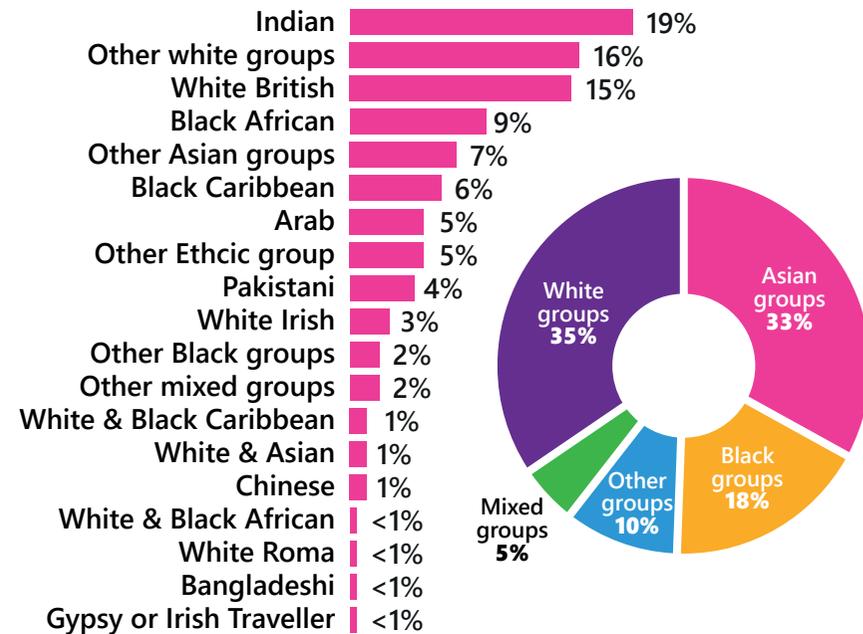
England & Wales, and well above the London average (41%). Around one third (34%) of residents used a main language other than English. 66% of Brent residents have English as their first language with the largest other three language groups being Gujarati, Romanian and Arabic.

In 2023, 82.3% of live births in Brent were in families where either one or both parents were born outside of the UK. On the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), Brent is ranked 5, placing it in the most deprived category for child poverty (top 1%).

English language proficiency Brent, 2021



Ethnic groups ranked



² Home | Brent Open Data

³ Births by parents' country of birth, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

Context – where we are now

A wide range of services for our pre-birth to 5 population make up Brent's early years system. Families can access universal and targeted support such as midwifery, health visiting, Family Wellbeing Centres (FWCs, to be called Best Start Family Hubs from April 2026) provide information, community support (including parent and toddler groups) council early years and early help services, and early education and childcare through our early years sector that spans self-employed childminders, private and voluntary pre-schools, day nurseries and school nurseries. These services are delivered by a range of partners including local authority, health and the private and voluntary sector.

Over 42,000 Brent residents are registered with Brent's 8 FWCs and these sites create opportunities for co-location and integrated working. Some services accessed by families will of course be more generic to communities rather than early years specific such as employment support, housing, libraries and GP surgeries. Together these services reflect the multi-generational impact that families, and indeed wider communities, can and should have on our youngest children; that **our children are part of families, who are part of communities, who are part of a wider society.**



Context – where we are now



Funding received through the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme has already enabled a focus on the services that support our youngest children, strengthening existing services such as infant feeding, parenting programmes and FWCs and enabling the introduction of valuable parent and infant mental health services, fathers work and evidence based home learning programmes such as Early Talk Boost and Parents as First Teachers. This has laid the groundwork for the ambitious vision set out in this strategy.

Brent and national datasets as well as feedback from parents/carers, young people and the early years workforce highlighted, alongside these strengths, areas to be addressed if we are to meet government targets relating to Good Levels of Development as well ensuring best child development outcomes in Brent. This data analysis and the lived experiences shared by these families and professionals has informed the development of key priorities and related work streams and actions.

Context – where we are now

Strengths

95.3% of children receive a new birth visits within 14 days +10.2% vs England

81.6% of children receive a 2-2.5 health review +0.7% vs England

61.3% of Brent children eligible for free school meals achieved a good level of development at the end of the foundation stage +10% vs National

96.5% of Brent schools and 98.4% of PVI settings are judged Good or Outstanding (Dec 2025)



Areas of need

At the 2 to 2.5 year health review, **75.6%** of children in Brent were at or above the expected level in all five areas of development (communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving, and personal-social skills). This is 5.8% below the national average of 81.4%.

64.6% of children receive the MMR vaccination at age 5 (2 doses) -19.1% vs England

362.4 Brent 0-5 year olds per 100k are admitted to hospital as a result of dental decay (0-5) +138.9 vs England

Take-up of the free entitlements to early education is low - **80.4%** for 3 and 4-year-olds. (5% lower than the London average) and **53.4%** for two year olds eligible for early learning (below the London average of 61.1%)

The proportion of children attaining a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception year in line with national averages (**68.3%** of children reaching a good level of development)

Context – where we are now

What did our parent/carers, young people and professionals say?

Over 400 parents, young people and professionals contributed their views in the development of this strategy through face to face and virtual consultation meetings and online surveys:

Area of focus	What's working well	What we need to do better
Partnership working	All agencies including the council, health services, community and voluntary groups and private sector partners are coming together to take collective action to ensure statutory requirements and key child development targets are met	Collective action across statutory agencies, the community and voluntary sector is needed to integrate services and improve outcomes for all children, including the development of a stronger neighbourhood-based approach
Joined up services	A range of good quality services are available and support has a positive impact for Brent's youngest children and their families	Services can be hard to navigate, with information dispersed and referral routes inconsistent. There are opportunities for professionals to share information and agree co-ordinated support that reduces possible duplication and results in a seamless experience for the family
Data	Good quality data informs services provision	Lack of data sharing between agencies can be a barrier to delivering services effectively and ensuring that those most in need are identified and supported at the earliest point

Needs to be even more accessible, consistent, and coordinated. Families should experience a seamless pathway from pregnancy to school entry, with fewer gaps between services.



... strengthen communication and referral pathways, ensuring families are guided rather than passed between services.



Family wellbeing centre are the greatest thing to have, so we can meet other parents and the child can be social with other children.

Context – where we are now

Area of focus	What's working well	What we need to do better
Inclusion	Early intervention supports all children to thrive	Families who have children with SEND face additional barriers in accessing services. This means they cannot always benefit from support at the earliest opportunity
Information	Information about the offer for families is available	A clear pathway of services and referral processes would help to ensure appropriate and timely support, enabling families to understand 'what happens next'
Early education	Children in Brent benefit from a diverse range of early years provision	A high quality and sustainable early years sector will be essential to ensure that every child thrives and achieves to the best of their ability and that more children are able to achieve a good level of development at the end of the reception year

“ I think the online services could be improved ...it's not easy to navigate and we don't get all the information ”



“ Parents know where to go for help. Support arrives quickly and consistently. Families feel valued, children thrive. ”



“ Every parent and carer should have easy access to parenting advice, health services, and early years education, regardless of income or background. ”

Vision – where we want to be

We want this strategy to bring genuine improvement in wellbeing for the borough's youngest children and their families. The Strategy recognises the importance of early years providers and the wider best start in life workforce as being vital in this delivery.

There are significant strengths in our borough as well as significant areas for development if we are to serve all of our children well. Conversations with parents/carers/ young people, the workforce across agencies and senior leaders had common threads:

- Be ambitious for our youngest children in acknowledgment that if we can get it right for children in the earliest years, society as a whole will benefit in the short, medium and long term
- To get it right for children, we must get it right for the wider family
- Work together to achieve this support for families and outcomes for children, as no one service / agency has the resources/remit/answers and only a whole system approach can make the difference in shifting entrenched problems.



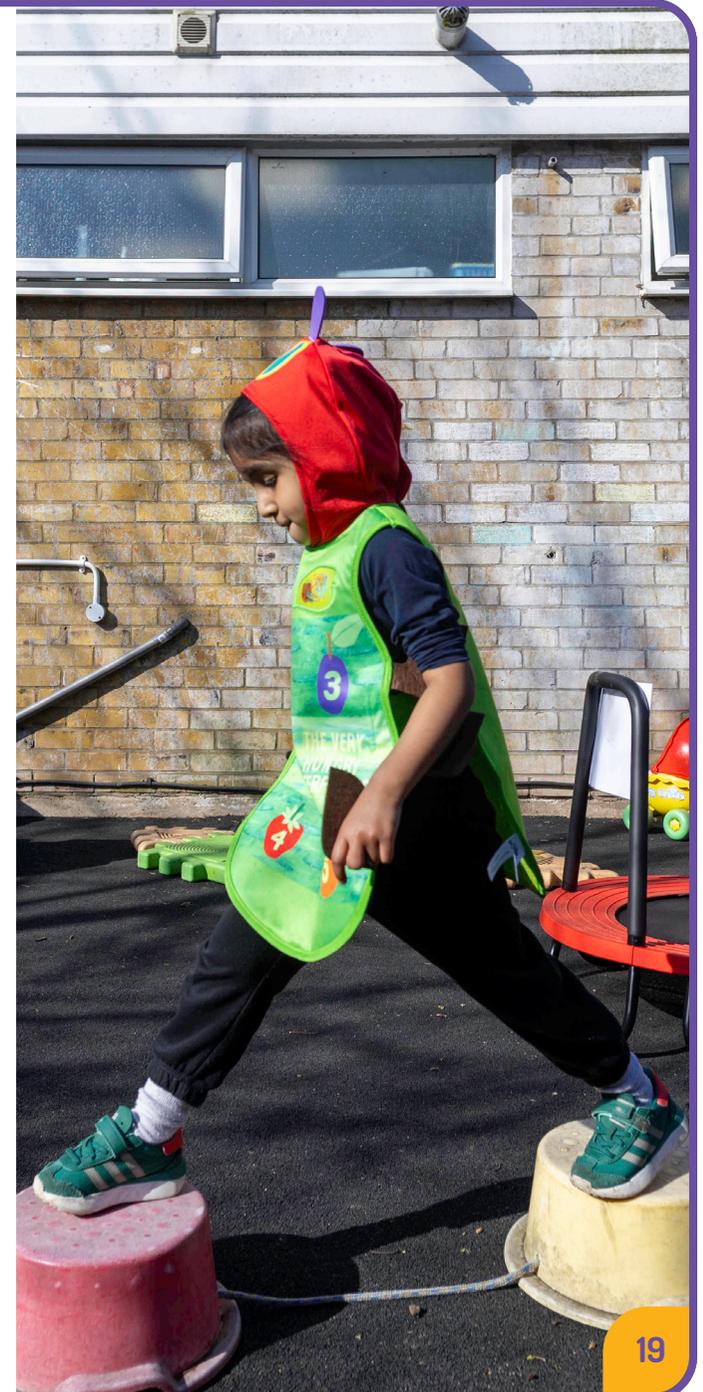
Vision – where we want to be

We want to continue to develop **trust** between families and services, providing Brent families with information and empowering them to be able to make informed choices about the services they can access. We recognize the diversity of Brent families and that support comes in many forms: from families, communities, voluntary sector providers (including parent and toddler groups), formal childcare and through public services. A number of factors can affect a family's interactions with services and as a result make it much harder to provide the nurturing and supportive home learning environment required for their child's development. We will aim for **innovative, whole system** approaches that address the multiple challenges families can face and support more children to take up early education and achieve a Good Level of Development at the end of their reception year.

We want **seamless services** for families, with senior leadership commitment across agencies to support the development of joint pathways and new approaches such as multi-agency workforce development for joint problem solving and effective collaboration.

FWCs (Best Start Family Hubs), with their comprehensive service offer and extensive reach, will remain a central plank in the delivery of this strategy and the requirements of the Best Start in Life strategy.

A key aim of this strategy is to support culture change. We want to embed the principle that by working together using the Making Every Contact Count approach, we can jointly across agencies, reach more families and support each other to deliver the vision and ambitions set out in this strategy, as well as key performance indicators (measures of success) across the sector.



Strategic priorities – How will we get there

Six priority areas have been identified and a detailed Early Years Strategy action plan co-produced with stakeholders to deliver these priorities. The actions in this Strategy will be driven forward by a Best Start in Life transformation board who will report back through the governance structure. By 2029, these are the differences we want to see for our children, families and workforce:

Key priority area

What will change by 2029

1

A joint commitment to system change

- A single, shared early years vision guides all partners.
- Leaders across health, education, social care and the voluntary sector share accountability for outcomes.
- Every service understands its role in delivering early childhood development targets

2

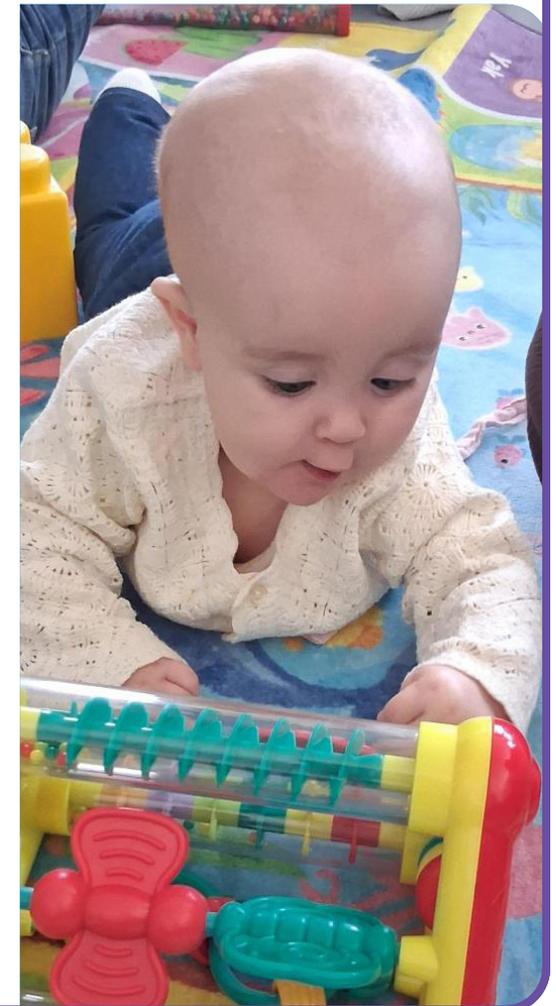
A seamless experience for families, jointly owned and delivered

- Referral routes, pathways and roles are clear and consistent across the borough
- Services operate through integration, shared delivery and aligned resources as part of a wider neighbourhood working approach
- Families experience a coherent, joined-up journey when accessing services across agencies.

3

Data that works for families and for professionals

- Partners use a shared dataset to drive decision-making and early identification.
- Information sharing is consistent, lawful and embedded in everyday practice.
- Data is used proactively to shape services, target inequalities and measure impact



Strategic priorities – How will we get there

4

A welcome from the start for every child and family - A focus on early years inclusion

- Earlier identification of needs, with timely assessment and intervention
- More children with SEND accessing and thriving in early education
- Reduced inequalities in early development, especially for disadvantaged wards and families in temporary accommodation

5

A clear Best Start in Life pathway for every Brent baby and family

- Parents and professionals aware of the universal and targeted support available
- Parents empowered to support their child's early learning including through using early learning entitlements
- Increased and shared understanding of the importance of early years and how this can affect outcomes for later life

6

High quality sustainable childcare that supports all children to thrive

- Increased numbers of children accessing high quality early years education and achieving Good Levels of Development at the end of reception year
- Sustained high quality financially sustainable early years provision across maintained, voluntary and private providers
- Increased sufficiency of childcare places, including for disadvantaged children and new approaches, including neighbourhood-based delivery, commissioning and multi-agency workforce development

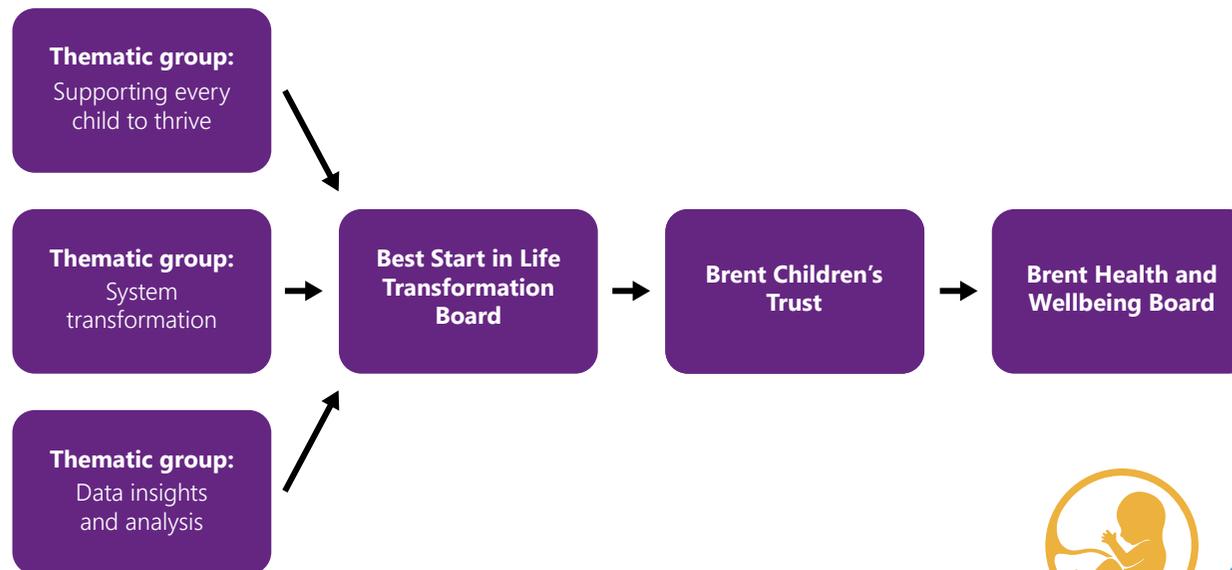


Governance - how we stay on track

Governance for this Strategy will sit alongside the delivery and reporting for the Best Start in Life requirements for the borough.

A multi-agency accountability structure will oversee delivery of the strategy based on existing governance arrangements. A multi-agency transformation delivery board, into which thematic working groups will report, will be implemented to drive forward the Brent EY Strategy Action Plan. As well as providing oversight, guidance and monitoring, this group will support the implementation of this strategy within their agencies, sustain progress in early years services and address workforce barriers to effective delivery.

The Best Start in Life Transformation Board will report to the Brent Children's Trust, that comprises representatives from the council, health partners and the voluntary sector. The Children's Trust will report in turn to the Brent Health and Wellbeing Board. The governance structure is set out below:





We would like to thank our families, practitioners, partners and volunteers who contributed to this strategy by sharing their experiences, ideas and photos with us.

