



# **Best Start Local Plan**

**April 2026-2029**

## 1. Executive Summary

The early years, from pregnancy through to age five, lay the foundations for children's health, learning, wellbeing and future opportunities. Decisions made and support provided during these early years have a lasting influence, shaping outcomes not only for individual children and families, but communities and society as a whole. Research demonstrates that investing early delivers the greatest social and economic return, helping to reduce inequalities, strengthen communities and support long-term prosperity.

***“Science tells us that a child’s experiences from conception through their first five years will go on to shape their next 50. It tells us that the kind of children we raise today, will reflect the kind of world we will live in tomorrow. It tells us that investing in the start of life is not an indulgence, but economically, socially and psychologically vital to a prosperous society.”***

*Jason Knauf, CEO of the Royal Foundation December 2020 (Foreword to Ipsos MORI report for the Royal Foundation)*

Our Best Start Local Plan sets out how together we will improve early child development and health outcomes, working towards the national 2028 ambition, set out in Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life. Rooted in the belief that a child's background should not determine their future success, our plan sets out a bold vision to ensure every child has the best start in life.

**Our vision is to ensure all early years children and their families in Southend have equitable access to joined-up, high-quality support that enables them to thrive and achieve, helping to Nurture Bright Futures for all Southend Children.**

Our ambitious target is that by 2028, 75.1% of children will reach a good level of development at the end of their reception year. This is an increase of 6.7% over 3 years.

The Best Start Local Plan is underpinned by key local and national strategies (Appendix 1) but also takes into consideration that Southend City is included in the priority group of councils that are in line for local government reorganisation. Therefore, the plan is iterative and will be adapted to respond to impending shifts in the local landscape.

## **2. About Southend**

### **2.1 Local Context and Considerations**

Southend-on-Sea (Southend) is a unitary Local Authority within the wider County of Essex. It has held unitary status since 1998 and became a city in 2022.

Southend is the eighth most densely populated area in the UK (excluding London) and is the closest seaside resort to London. The city has seven miles of award-winning beaches and coastal nature reserves, over 80 parks and green spaces, 14 conservation areas and is home to the longest leisure pier in the world.

Southend is one of Essex's most deprived areas, it has a higher index of deprivation than both Essex and England as a whole. 9 areas are identified as being in the top 10% most deprived areas in England, conversely there are 13 areas ranked in the least 10% deprived. As such it is critical to understand that city level data can mask significant differences in local neighbourhoods and highlights the importance of place-based service delivery to target need.

There is a deep history of innovation with early years in Southend, with A Better Start Southend, and this is an opportunity to learn from this experience and build on the successes identified.

The impact of deprivation on child development is a significant concern for public health. Research indicates that children living in areas with higher levels of deprivation and child poverty have poorer outcomes. These children are also less likely to reach a good level of development in school reception classes.

### **2.2 The Assessment of Need**

A clear understanding of Southend's needs is essential to delivering effective support for children and young people. By gathering and analysing robust data, we can better identify emerging trends, highlight gaps, and set informed priorities.

To ensure the Best Start Local Plan responds to the needs of local families, we have drawn on a range of evidence about Southend's communities, including data from the [Starting Well Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) (JSNA), The Childcare Sufficiency Report, local service data and a detailed site analysis of existing Family Centre locations.

Evidence from the JSNA highlights priorities including maternal health and wellbeing, early language development, healthy weight, and improving outcomes for children living in disadvantaged communities. The childcare sufficiency report demonstrates a rising need for childcare places for working families since the increase in working parent entitlements, but a decrease in uptake of Early Learning for Two's places in recent months.

Southend has many services supporting children and families across different organisations, but these can sometimes feel disconnected. Best Start Family Hubs aim to create a more joined up, preventative, systemwide approach where the workforce is able to easily signpost and support families to appropriate support at the right time.

### **2.3 Demographic Overview**

In Southend, there are approximately 12,168 children aged 0-5, 13,252 aged 6-11, and 16,247 aged 12-19, giving a total of 41,667 children and young people aged 0-19.

Across Southend, 182 providers deliver early years education and funded entitlements for children aged 0-5, comprising 100 active childminders, 28 day nurseries, 20 pre-schools, 5 independent schools, 18 schools with nursery classes, 11 schools without nursery classes and 29 schools with Reception classes.

Southend is increasingly diverse although the majority of children attending Southend schools, 70.5%, are White. The next largest groups are Asian/British Asian, 11.2%, Mixed/Dual heritage, 7.5%, and Black/Black British 7.9% \*

*\*January schools census 2024*

Southend is ranked 113 out of 317 Local Authorities on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), placing it in the more deprived category. On the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), Southend is ranked 118, placing it within the most deprived category for child poverty (top 37%).

### 3. Current Position

#### 3.1 Early Years Outcomes Data

##### Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Data

In 2024, Southend recorded a good level of development (GLD) of 65.5%, which was below the national average of 67.7%. However, in 2025, Southend achieved a GLD of 68.4%, surpassing the national average of 68.3%. This represents a 2.9 percentage point increase year-on-year. 50.5% of children eligible for Free School Meals, achieved GLD, highlighting a significant gap in outcomes. Closing this gap is a key priority. In addition, raising standards for children learning English as an Additional Language is another priority for 2026, with 56.7% of children achieving GLD. Our target for 2028 is that 75.1% of children will reach a good level of development which is an increase of 6.7%, equating to an additional 134 children.

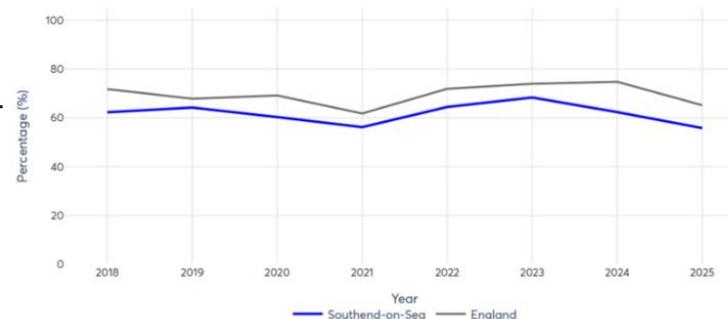
##### Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) Data

The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3), completed as part of the 2 to 2½ year health review, provides an important early indicator of children’s development across five areas: communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving and personal, social development. In Southend, 82% of children were accessed as being at or above the expected level across all five areas, slightly above the national average of 81.4%. Strong outcomes are evident in gross motor and fine motor development; however, outcomes are slightly below the national average in problem solving and personal, social development. In addition, coverage of the 2 to 2½ year review is currently lower than the national average, with 67.3% of children receiving the review. Improving the reach and strengthening support for children identified with emerging needs will be important to ensure children receive early support at a critical stage of development.

#### 3.2 Uptake of Early Education Entitlements

Access to high-quality early education plays an important role in supporting children’s development. In Southend, 3643 children currently access early childhood and care entitlements. Currently uptake of Early Learning for Two’s (formally Disadvantaged 2’s funding) places is 59%. The target is 76% and therefore increasing the number of eligible families taking up their funded places for two-year-olds is a priority for Southend. Ensuring children benefit from early learning opportunities gives them a strong start and helps narrow gaps in outcomes before children start school and at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Early childhood education and care entitlements uptake (2-year-olds)  
Southend-on-Sea



### 3.3 Current support for Early Years providers

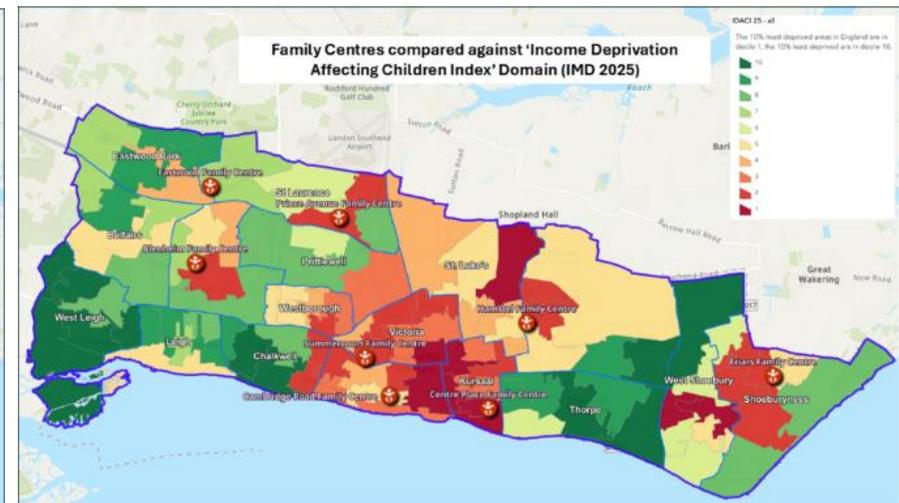
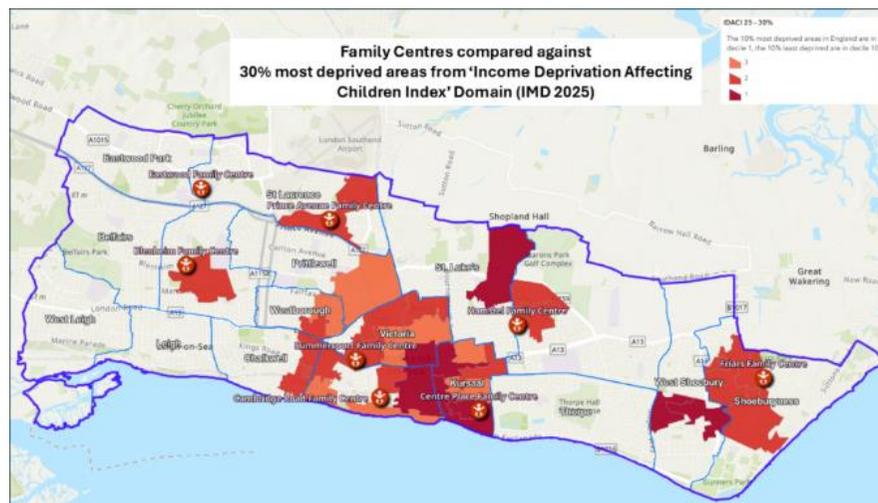
The Family Early Years and Childcare service provides integrated support for children, families, and early years providers. It oversees early years funding, childcare sufficiency, and guidance for families seeking childcare. The service strengthens quality and practice in EYFS settings, supports children with SEND through early identification and tailored intervention, and works closely with health partners. Family Centres offer universal play and support, while the Early Years Family Support Service delivers targeted early help, including home-based support and parenting programmes. The service also coordinates the Holiday Activities and Food programme for children eligible for Free School Meals.

### 3.4 Building on existing services to create Best Start Family Hubs

In February 2024, a statutory public consultation on Southend's Family Centre offer took place. Engagement with and feedback from families, partners and community organisations strongly supported retaining accessible local centres, expanding core activities at convenient times, strengthening health related sessions, and increasing opportunities for community use. Family Centres now operate within the Family Early Years and Childcare Service in partnership with Public Health.

### 3.5 Reach

Mapping demonstrates that the existing centres are well placed to serve communities in the most disadvantaged areas. The space available will enable expansion to the full core offer of Best Start Family Hubs for families of children 0-5 and beyond. Building on familiar locations minimises disruption, increases trust, and supports rapid implementation. This will ensure a smooth transition and allow time for collaboration across services in Best Start Family Hubs, with consideration to national strategies and changes such as SEND Reforms, Local Government Reorganisation and Families First Partnership Programme.



#### 4. Best Start in Life Priorities

In response to the local context and current position the following themes have shaped our priorities.

1. **Reducing Inequality and Targeting Need** – A commitment to narrowing gaps by directing attention and resource towards children and families experiencing disadvantage or additional vulnerability.
2. **Family Voice and Lived Experience** – Ensuring the experiences, insights and feedback of babies, children and families actively inform service design, improvement and evaluation.
3. **Inclusive Engagement** – Proactively reaching and engaging families who are less likely to access support, including young parents, fathers and partners, culturally diverse communities, and those facing practical or digital barriers.
4. **Working together** – collaborating with voluntary organisations, community groups, social care teams, libraries, health, education, SEND services, schools, early years providers and families to agree and commission the services needed to deliver our shared priorities from April 2026.
5. **Early Identification and Prevention** – Embedding a preventative approach across the system, identifying emerging needs early and intervening before challenges escalate.

Priority 1: Provide a core offer for babies, children and their families from pregnancy to age 5 and beyond in Best Start Family Hubs.

Priority 2: Ensure all families in Southend can access their early years entitlement in high-quality and inclusive early years settings, supporting children's learning, health and development.

Priority 3: Provide specialist support for families of children with emerging needs, Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), and those facing disadvantage in early years settings, schools and Best Start Family Hubs.

Priority 4: Provide structured, evidence-based parenting interventions and a home learning environment (HLE) framework, which plays a central role in shaping children's early communication, social development and long-term learning.

Priority 5: Ensure a systems approach is embedded across the NHS partners, Education and Families First Partnership Programme and key priorities are embedded across the system to reduce inequalities for families.

**Priority 1:** Provide a core offer for babies, children and their families from pregnancy to age 5 and beyond in Best Start Family Hubs.

### **What's Working Well?**

Group sessions, stay and play, parental support, and a wide range of activities for children aged 0–5 and their families are embedded across the week. Health visiting, midwifery appointments, groups, and courses, operate with flexible antenatal programmes jointly delivered by health, early years and community groups. High-quality joint practice is demonstrated through Level 3 and Gold UNICEF Baby Friendly accreditation and strong partnership with Early Years Improvement Teachers and SEND advisors. Family Support Teams deliver homebased support and work closely with health, education, and social care partners.

### **Identified gaps:**

Despite a wide range of services and activities being available through Family Centres, not all families are currently accessing this support. Families in priority groups or those experiencing disadvantage, who would benefit most from early support, are less likely to engage. This highlights the need for more targeted outreach, communication, and coordinated support, alongside a more streamlined system to monitor and evaluate reach, engagement and impact. Other services and agencies are not always aware of the offer available.

### **How will this priority be achieved?**

- Develop the core offer for families to include specific language groups for families of babies and young children in all Best Start Family Hubs.
- Continue to provide a comprehensive Perinatal support offer, including Journey to Parenthood Antenatal classes, in Best Start Family Hubs and by partner organisations in the community.
- Create specific learning and development activities for families to access in all stay and play groups, particular focus on the prime areas of the EYFS.
- Share Nurturing Bright Futures with professionals and families and use the document in groups with families to share the foundations of early development and support available in Southend.

- Work with the strategic steering group and partners to develop a more detailed local needs analysis, mapping existing provision, and focusing on harder to reach families, priority groups and communities, to establish gaps to meet the needs of all families, particularly those at risk of disadvantage.
- Develop a communication strategy to reach families through a clear timetable, social media, upgraded website, communication in Best Start Family Hubs, and information shared by trusted partners (schools, settings, community partners e.g. libraries, food banks, faith groups).
- Work towards 'Best Start Family Hubs without walls'. Develop a strategy for increasing reach and engagement in targeted areas through carefully coordinated outreach and meeting families where they are in the community.
- Develop the metrics and data dashboard. Create a shared data dashboard with clear metrics to collate data across services to monitor impact, reach, engagement and outcomes for children.

#### **What does success look like?**

- Increased reach, with greater footfall at Best Start Family Hubs accessing both health and education services.
- Greater engagement from families particularly those in priority groups and/or families less likely to engage.
- Increase in families accessing early years entitlements.
- Increase in children reaching a good level of development.

**Priority 2:** Ensure all families in Southend can access their early years entitlement in high-quality and inclusive early years settings, supporting children's learning, health and development.

#### **What's Working Well?**

The Funding and Sufficiency team offer clear, current information which helps families, professionals, and providers understand funding and entitlements. All providers have a link Early Years Teacher or Officer offering targeted quality support, alongside a comprehensive training offer for settings, childminders, and Reception teachers. Schools access EYFS Profile support, while SEND Therapies provide specialist training with Speech and Language and Occupational Therapists. Verbo is available to support communication needs, and the Early Years SEND Team offers bespoke advice to strengthen inclusion across all settings.

#### **Identified gaps:**

While clear information, training and specialist support are in place to support early years providers, uptake of funded places, particularly Early Learning for Two's, remains below the expected level to ensure all eligible families are able to access their entitlement. There is also a need to ensure sufficient high-quality places are available in the right locations to enable full uptake of these entitlements. Further work is needed to strengthen consistency in practice across early years settings, develop greater support for Reception class teachers, and build a shared understanding of school readiness across the system.

#### **How will this priority be achieved?**

- Work with multiagency colleagues to ensure all partners are aware of funding entitlements, especially Early Learning for Two's to increase the uptake.
- Deliver ongoing professional development for early years providers and Reception class teachers focused on the priorities and gaps identified, to support consistent challenge, guidance, and sustained improvement.
- Develop and maintain high-quality online resources for providers that promote evidence-based practice and support early identification.
- Link with health professionals to develop a format to support early years providers in completing assessments and referrals.
- Create a programme of support for transition to school and supporting a shared understanding of readiness for school across Southend.
- Provide support for early years teachers and senior leaders around the Early Years Foundation Stage profile, including moderation support.
- Embed consistent use of the Nurturing Bright Futures guidance across all services to create a shared language around child development.

#### **What does success look like?**

- Sufficient and sustainable provision is available in the right places for families, evidenced in childcare sufficiency report.
- Increase in take-up of Early Learning for Two's places and meet 76% target.
- Positive outcomes from OFSTED inspections.
- Increased GLD towards 75.1% target and increase in GLD for children in receipt of Free School Meals.

**Priority 3:** Provide specialist support for families of children with emerging needs, Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), and those facing disadvantage in early years settings, schools and Best Start Family Hubs.

### **What's Working Well?**

The Early Years SEND Service has well established systems for referrals from health professionals, settings and schools and responds promptly, ensuring access to timely support to identify emerging needs. All providers are aware of the service and the training, support and guidance available for early identification and inclusion. Strong collaboration between early years settings, SEND services, health and social care teams, and families supports joined-up decision-making around children's needs. A targeted speech and language group has been tested in a Family Centre through partnership between Speech and Language Therapists, SEND Advisors, and Health Visitors. A short test and learn trial of Early Years SEND Advisor supporting within Stay and Play groups and based in Family Centres took place from January 2026 - March 2026.

### **Identified gaps:**

While well-established referral systems and specialist support are in place through the Early Years SEND service, families do not always access support at the earliest opportunity. Families can find the landscape of services complex and difficult to navigate, particularly where multiple services are involved, which can delay children receiving timely support. Strengthening early identification, clearer pathways between services and providers, and improving awareness of available support and funding will help ensure children with emerging or additional needs receive the right support as early as possible.

### **How will priority be achieved?**

- Specialist EY SEND support in Best Start Family Hubs and the delivery of groups for families with children 0-5 with identified needs or delay in development. This will build on our current test and learn offer.
- Develop groups and activities with partners in Best Start Family Hubs following the success of the Mini Talkers test and learn.
- Work with partners to create a clear enhanced offer and referral pathway, with direct routes of communication between services and providers, to ensure families only tell their story once and children and families are referred to additional support in a timely manner.

- Work closely with Health and Social Care partners to ensure that families are reached at the earliest opportunity, particularly those at risk of disadvantage.
- Ensure that all families and early years providers are aware of the funding offers available (Early Learning, DAF, SENIF) to enable children to receive the support and entitlements they are eligible for and these are used to meet individual needs.
- Provide a comprehensive package of training and development for SENCo's.
- Support the development of evidenced based parenting programmes that aid early identification and meet the needs of families of children with SEND.
- All settings will have access to VERBO to support speech and language development, and childminders will have access as appropriate.

#### **What does success look like?**

- Increased sessions with Speech and Language focus for families of children under 5.
- Increase in interventions available for families of children with identified, or emerging, needs.
- Increased understanding among families, of the support and services available, and their ability to access them.
- Referrals made to specialist services are timely, accurate and appropriate, and a decrease in children starting school with unidentified needs.

**Priority 4:** Provide structured, evidence-based parenting interventions and a home learning environment (HLE) framework, which plays a central role in shaping children's early communication, social development and long-term learning.

#### **What's Working Well?**

The Best Start Family Hubs Steering group established a task and finish group to identify appropriate Evidence Based Interventions (EBI) for both parenting and Home Learning Environments. The group brought together a wide range of partners to triangulate local data with lived experience, test alignment with our wider Best Start priorities and existing provision, and the potential impact on outcomes for 3-4-year-olds. See Appendix 3 for full report.

**Identified gaps:**

While work has taken place to review evidence-based parenting and home learning environment interventions to align these with local priorities, a consistent, structured offer for families is not yet in place across Southend. Greater visibility and targeted outreach will be needed to ensure that families who would benefit most are able to access this support. Further work is also needed to design and implement a coordinated programme with clear entry points for families, supported by a trained workforce and integrated within Best Start Family Hubs, alongside clear pathways between services so families can access further support where needed.

**How will this priority be achieved?**

- Complete planning for programme design, including financial modelling and operational decisions, and procure the programme for delivery.
- Work closely with colleagues leading on Families First Partnership Programme to deliver an offer that can complement the evidence into practice foundations work and ensure a joined-up evidence-based parenting programme across Southend.
- Design an operational plan for delivery of programmes in person, online and through a digital offer, considering workforce, training, timetabling, sign-up and booking.
- Share information about the offer of Evidence-Based Interventions (EBIs) with all services so they promote these within their work with families.
- Develop a workforce plan and recruit specific roles for delivery of EBIs to protect existing services' time and workload.
- Use 'Train the trainer' model for EBIs to ensure consistency especially regarding staff turnover, alignment with Southend principles, and longer-term cost-saving.
- Embed the universal offer from pre-birth as the first step and working in sequential order.
- Use Test and Learn to explore how best to integrate the agreed Home Learning Programme into existing provision in Best Start Family Hubs.

**What does success look like?**

- Trainers are trained and courses begin.
- Appropriate families are identified and supported to access courses and home learning materials.

- Number of families engaging with the parenting EBIs and progress towards the PASCAL target of 812 families to improve GLD from 68.4% to 71.3% in the first year.
- Adequate capacity within the workforce to deliver the EBIs in an effective and sustainable manner.

**Priority 5:** Ensure a systems approach is embedded across the NHS partners, Education and Families First Partnership Programme and key priorities are embedded across the system to reduce inequalities for families.

### **What is working well?**

There is currently NHS midwifery offers running from Family Centres which will continue as we move to Best Start Family Hubs. There is a commissioned NHS service for perinatal mental health. There are also commissioned services for Speech and Language, Occupational Therapist and SEND working closely with education colleagues in the SEND therapies service.

### **Identified Gaps**

Despite a wide range of services and activities being available families in priority groups or those experiencing disadvantage, those who would benefit most from early support, are not always reached. This highlights the need for more place-based delivery and to ensure NHS visibility in the Best Start Family Hubs.

### **How will this be achieved?**

- Work in partnership to design an offer that supports place-based delivery across services. This is a key priority for Phase One.
- Work together to co-design local offers that meet the need of all families.
- Ensure NHS partners are a key partner at the Best Start Steering Group.
- Complete local mapping to identify gaps across services.

### **What does success look like?**

- Increase in NHS services in Best Start Family Hubs.

- Best Start Family Hubs programme and the Families First reforms within Southend work in alignment to maximise the benefits of both programmes.

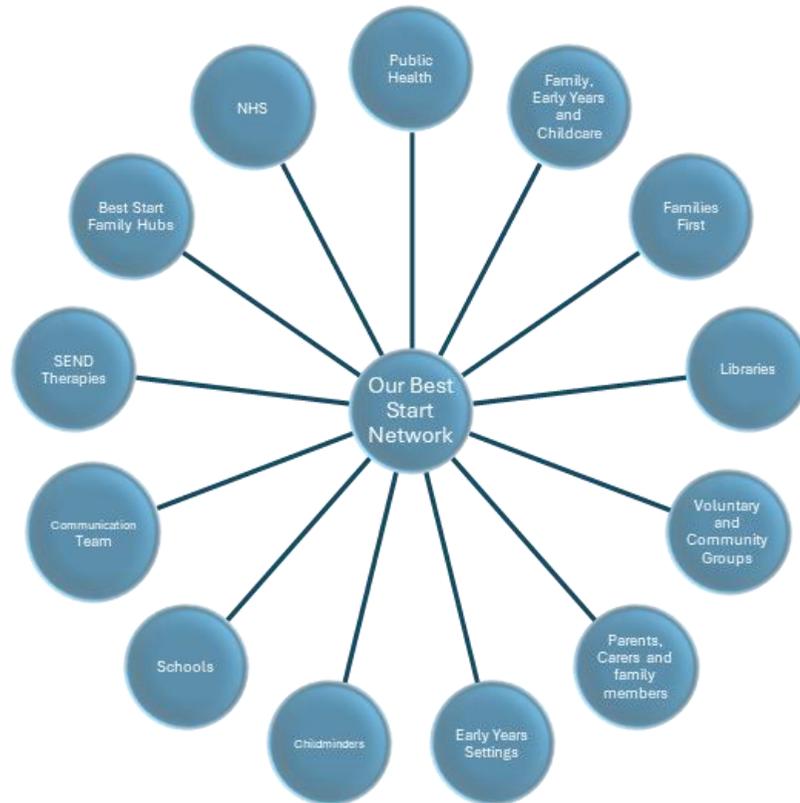
The priorities outlined above will be delivered through a phased implementation approach. All work to this date is part of the Development Phase, and Phase 1 will cover the first year of delivery, from April 2026 to April 2027. A detailed implementation plan will be co-produced and agreed through the Best Start Steering Group to ensure alignment with wider council priorities, existing services and partnership activity.

## 5. A whole system approach to improving Early Years Outcomes

### 5.1 Strong partnership working sits at the heart of Southend's Best Start approach

While many children in Southend thrive in their early years, there are differences in outcomes across the city and GLD data demonstrates the gap between children in receipt of free school meals and those who are not. Understanding the experiences of children and families, where children are doing well and where additional support is needed, helps partners focus resources and support where it will make the greatest difference. Together, this evidence highlights the importance of coordinated early support, strong partnerships and accessible services for families.

Southend's Best Start network brings together the partners, within the local authority, health, community and voluntary services, who are already working collectively to improve early development and health outcomes.



The Network is underpinned by a shared commitment to champion equity, inclusion and co-production.

Our Key Principles in how we work together are:

- Joined up
- Co-produced, shaped by lived experience
- Accessible
- Inclusive
- Shared language
- Strengths-based
- Bold, and willing to do things that are “uncomfortably different”

## **5.2 Best Start Family Hubs**

Southend Best Start Family Hubs will provide a single, integrated access point for families, bringing together early years health, education and wider support services. Southend Best Start Family Hubs will provide a core offer for babies, children and their families with a clear pathway from pregnancy to age 5 and beyond.

They will include enhanced SEND support, evidenced based parenting programmes, access to health services for babies and young children, and groups and services to support children's language development, particularly for 3-and 4-year-olds. They must be accessible for all families but in areas that reach the most disadvantaged families.

## **5.3 Health services**

The current Family Centres already provide a strong foundation of integrated health support for families from pregnancy onwards. Services delivered include antenatal care, midwifery clinics, health visiting services, breastfeeding support, baby massage and physiotherapy. Education practitioners work alongside midwifery teams to co-deliver antenatal sessions, helping families build relationships with services before their baby is born. Engagement with antenatal services is strong, providing an important entry point for families into the wider support available. Phase One will build on this engagement, strengthening partnerships between health and early years practitioners so families remain connected to their local Best Start Family Hubs and can access parenting and home learning support, through a clear pathway of services. There will also be a continued focus on strengthening perinatal support, including perinatal mental health, recognising the vital role this period plays in securing the best start in life for every child.

## **5.4 Voluntary and Community groups**

Voluntary and community groups are well embedded within current Family Centres, delivering a wide range of groups and services that respond to the needs of the local community. These include support for families experiencing financial hardship, groups for families of children with complex additional needs, and support for those affected by domestic abuse or substance misuse. Well-established organisations such as YMCA, Family Action and Citizens Advice also use Family Centres as trusted community spaces to deliver advice, guidance and practical support. Southend has also made good use of recent lived-experience data from families and knowledge gleaned through the A Better Start Southend (ABSS) partnership, building on what is known to work well and identifying areas for development. The legacy of learning from ABSS is now being taken forward through a purpose driven social legacy organisation City Family, which includes family navigators and Dads Connect.

Moving into Phase One, the voluntary and community sector will play an important role in shaping the development of Best Start Family Hubs. Community voice will be embedded within governance structures, including representation from SAVS on the Best Start Steering group, and a range of community partners on the delivery and engagement group and task and finish groups.

Alongside this, outreach approaches will be strengthened to meet families where they are, raising awareness of available support and helping more families, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, to engage with their Best Start Family Hub.

### **5.5 Families First Partnership Programme**

Best Start Family Hubs and Families First are central to a wider national reform agenda aimed at creating a more coherent, joined-up system of whole-family support. Although they originate from different strands of policy and operate with separate funding and governance, both share a common vision: ensuring families receive the right support at the right time, with fewer changes of worker and a more consistent, seamless experience throughout. This ambition aligns closely with the priorities set out in Southend's Early Help Strategy, to enable families to feel empowered, supported and connected to help when they need it. Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy babies and the Family First Partnership programme all emphasise early intervention, integrated working, shared assessment processes, and consistent multi-agency practice. Therefore, Families First leadership are key representatives of the Best Start Steering group helping to shape the Best Start in Life plan and shared vision to ensure synergy to the developments needed under each set of reforms. The commitment to integrating the Best Start Family Hubs programme and the Families First reforms within Southend to maximise the benefits of both programmes is outlined in Appendix 4.

### **5.6 How innovative practice will be scaled**

There is a history of innovation through A Better Start Southend and as we move forwards, we are committed to innovating and adapting our approach to achieve our ambitious vision.

We have made connections across local authorities to accelerate our learning, particularly in respect of outcomes from evidenced based parenting programmes. We will build on these connections especially with Local Authorities who have a similar set of challenges to us, and those who are near us who have established Best Start Family Hubs and programmes running for a period of time. This will enable us to learn from the solutions they have developed and the challenges or obstacles they have faced.

### **Case Study: Partnership working to design a document for families supporting child development 0-5.**

Nurturing Bright Futures is a strategically led, co-produced guide to supporting child development from pregnancy to age five. Shaped by a wide range of voices and expertise across Southend, the document reflects a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and families. The work was led strategically by the Early Years and Childcare Improvement Team Manager, with a clear focus on sharing expertise across services, ensuring the document remained evidence based, current and grounded in best practice. Early years colleagues, health partners, Family Centre professionals, SEND specialists, parents and wider services all contributed to producing the guide.

The result is clear and accessible guidance aligned to the national Best Start in Life strategy. It provides a shared understanding of child development and reinforces a simple but vital message as Southend works towards its GLD target of 75.1% by 2028: high quality, everyday interactions make the difference. Links to national and local services ensure families can access the right support at the right time and that professionals have the right links to signpost to.

Nurturing Bright Futures is becoming embedded across the city. It is shared with schools, early years settings, childminders, health teams and services working directly with families. It is introduced within antenatal groups and copies provided to parents and explored within Best Start Family Hubs. As Southend selects an evidence-based home learning programme, Nurturing Bright Futures provides the core vehicle to strengthen the home learning environment and improve outcomes for all children.

## **Case Study: Test and learn: Early Years SEND link to Family Centre groups and services**

To strengthen early identification and support for young children with emerging additional needs, the Early Years SEND team have worked in close partnership with Health and the Family Centres to introduce a SEND Link Advisor within the Best Start Family Hubs. The aim is to ensure that families can access specialist guidance at the earliest opportunity in a familiar and community-based environment.

The early years SEND manager worked collaboratively with the Family Centre manager, senior practitioners, early years practitioners, family support workers, health visitors and the Speech and Language service to develop a model that embeds SEND expertise directly into the universal and targeted offer. This includes developing shared referral pathways, agreeing priority groups, and aligning the SEND Advisor's role with existing Best Start Family Hubs activities such as Stay & Plays, targeted groups, and early help conversations. As a result, we have implemented a Mini Talkers Language and Communication group for parents and children that targets 3–4-year-olds who have identified delays in their language development. This is planned and delivered by our EY SEND Link Advisor and a Speech and Language Therapist and responds to referrals from health visitors who have identified language delays at a child's 2-year developmental check. We have also implemented a Language and Communication group for parents and children that targets 0–9-month-olds, planned and delivered by our EY SEND Link Advisor. Regular joint planning meetings allow us to shape a responsive timetable, whilst co-location within the Hubs helps build trust, visibility, and stronger cross-team communication and sharing of good practice.

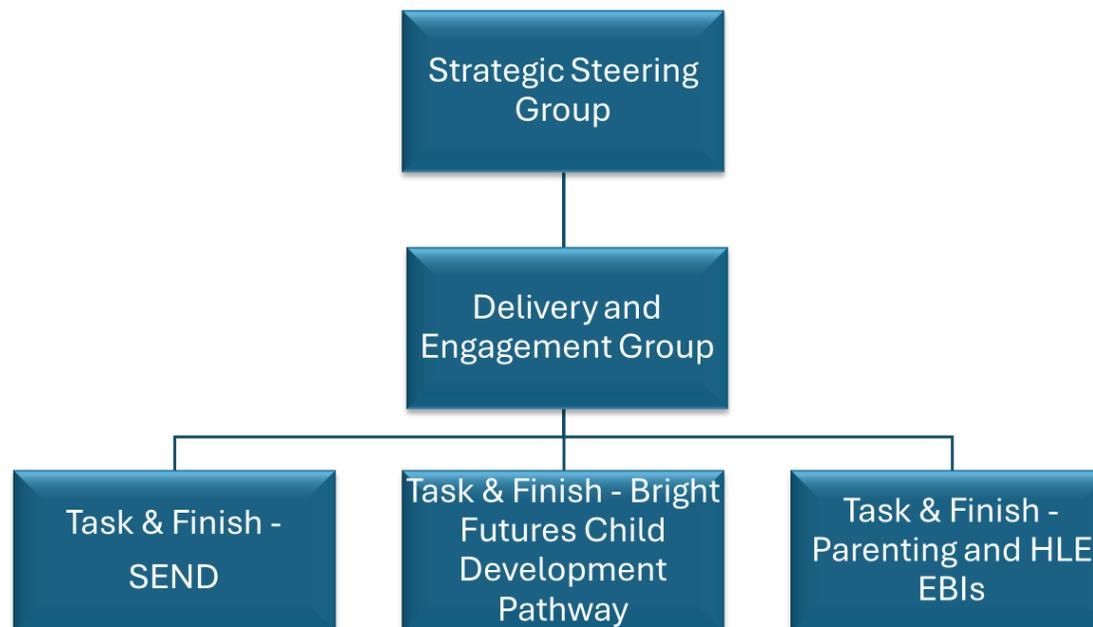
This approach also enabled Family Centre staff to seek immediate advice from a SEND Specialist, increasing their confidence in recognising developmental differences and supporting families sensitively. Families benefit from timely, relationship-based conversations with a specialist who can offer reassurance, practical strategies, and guidance on next steps without the formality of a traditional appointment.

## 6. Best Start Governance

The Best Start in Life network reflects the breadth of collaboration and structures in place to provide strategic direction, oversight and accountability. The Best Start governance model ensures that partnership working translates into coordinated delivery, measurable progress and shared responsibility for impact.

The multi-agency steering group sets the strategic direction for Best Start Family Hubs, aligning national guidance with local priorities and need. It also provides oversight of delivery, funding and outcomes, enables joined-up working, reviews risk, makes key decisions, including agreeing recommendations from Task & Finish Groups and escalates issues where required.

The delivery and engagement group feeds into the steering group, bringing together insights from partners, operational considerations and learning from test and learn projects, to inform decision-making. Task and Finish groups have been established in the Development Phase to focus on specific priorities or challenges, bringing partners together to develop solutions and make recommendations to the steering group. Together, these groups ensure strong partnership working, clear accountability and a coordinated approach to delivering the Best Start vision in Southend.



## **7. Performance Framework and Funding**

### **7.1 Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact**

To measure progress against the Best, Start for Life plan, during the first year we will co-produce an outcomes and performance framework that tracks both early years and health outcomes and incorporates parent experience measures.

Routine reporting processes will be built into existing governance structures to demonstrate how together, partners are meeting GLD targets, improving school-readiness outcomes, and embedding continuous learning and improvement.

Our mixed-methods evaluation approach will draw on qualitative and quantitative data, supported by shared data dashboards that enable joint planning and align local metrics with national GLD priorities.

### **7.2 Funding**

During the first-year capital and revenue requirements will be confirmed by the steering group and a workforce plan agreed to support effective delivery. We will ensure that funding decisions are fully aligned with our priorities and the child outcomes we aim to improve. During the first year, we will explore opportunities for pooled budgets and joint commissioning, with changes reflected in year two. Priority actions include developing a clear and sustainable funding narrative, reviewing the compatibility of commissioned services with our priorities, and exploring pooled funding through governance boards. Progress will be measured through monitoring unit costs, pooled funding availability, and the number of jointly commissioned services

## Appendices

Appendix 1 - Strategic Context

Appendix 2 – Communication and engagement information

Appendix 3 - Evidence based Interventions and Home learning report

Appendix 4 – Best Start Family Hubs and Families First

Appendix 5 – Site analysis and ensuring sites meet Best Start Criteria.

## Appendix 1

### Local Policy Drivers

- [Southend-on-Sea City Council Corporate Plan 2024/28](#) – including the priority ‘A city that is: Caring with a good quality of life for all’ to ensure every child has the best possible start in life and to address the root causes of poverty and inequality.
- [Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan \(“The Healthies”\)](#) – particularly *Healthy Starts* and *Healthy Minds*, prioritising maternal mental wellbeing, early intervention, parental support and reducing health inequalities.
- [Starting Well Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) – providing the evidence base on the needs and strengths of children aged 0-5 and highlighting areas of inequality.
- [Southend SEND JSNA](#)
- [Southend SEND Strategy 2023 to 2026](#)
- [Southend Early Help Strategy 2026](#) – strengthening early intervention, coordinated support, and workforce development, to ensure families are connected to the right support at the right time.

### National Policy Drivers

- Best Start in Life Strategy (DfE & DHSC) [Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life](#)
- [Healthy Child Programme](#)
- [Every Child Achieving and Thriving](#)
- [Families First](#) – transforming Early Help and Child in Need into a single, multiagency Family Help system.
- NHS Long Term Plan and Public Health frameworks
- Statutory duties: Childcare Act 2006; Children and Families Act 2014; safeguarding duties

**Appendix 2  
Communication and engagement.**

<b>30/7/2025</b>	<b>20/8/2025</b>	<b>21/8/2025</b>	<b>2/9/2025</b>	<b>9/9/2025</b>	<b>24/9/2025</b>	<b>24/9/2025</b>	<b>14/10/2025</b>	<b>3/11/2025</b>
SCC team discussion Giving every child the Best Start in life	Family event, engagement with families regarding service impact and needs	Best Start meeting, MP, Leader	Briefing on Giving every child the Best Start in life	Education Early Years and inclusion briefing	MP visit to Family Centre, discussion regarding core services and moving forward to Best Start Family Hubs	Briefing at SAVS during the Southend early help briefing	Provider Updates and input. Head teacher discussion	Briefing and networking sessions. Schools, early years settings. Health and community partners.

<b>6/11/2025</b>	<b>21/11/2025</b>	<b>26/11/2025</b>	<b>11/12/2026</b>	<b>6/1/2026</b>	<b>15/1/2026</b>	<b>21/1/2026</b>	<b>28/1/2026</b>	<b>4/2/2026</b>
Southend SEND day engagement with families	Nurturing Bright futures Launch, partners event and Best start in life update	Head teacher briefing and input for local plans and task and finish groups	CPHMT update, agreement for standing up steering group and task & finish groups	Steering group 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting <b>7/1/2026</b> EBI multiagency task and finish group meeting	Community groups update and visit	Head teacher/ HOS meeting Family Centre site BSFH	Family early years and childcare service update	EBI task and Finish group final meeting

## Appendix 3

### Evidence based Interventions and Home learning report

#### Southend Best Start in Life Family Hubs & Healthy Babies Parenting Framework - Nurturing Bright Futures

##### Reach and Modelling

Using the Nesta/PASCAL evidence-based parenting and home learning modelling tool provided by DFE, it estimated that Southend needs to aim to reach 812 families to improve a good level of development (GLD) from 68.4% to 71.3%.

Phase 1 of the Best Start Family Hubs is to roll out a universal evidence-based parenting programme across Southend, by embedding Incredible Years (IY). Incredible Years is an American programme, however the DFE and the IY have agreed these can be locally adapted in order to meet finer detail in the EYFS.

IY does not offer an online self-learning module; however, the programme can be delivered by Teams/Zoom. For parents with no way to attend a face-to-face/zoom IY programme, a discrete number of Triple P online licenses will be purchased. This will minimise any mixed messages by rolling out multiple different programmes that may be conflicting. Triple P is an Australian programme.

The IY Advance programme is a specialist programme for managing complex behaviors in children, that may also be suitable for families needing SEND support.

The IY programme also has a school-based parenting programme for families where there are children 6–12-year-olds. The school-based component is out of scope for Best Start in Life funding and will need to be separately purchased with additional training and resources. The chosen Home Learning Environment (HLE) programme will be through PEEP. This is a digital resource platform for parents and professionals that can be adapted and rolled out into single targeted topics and sessions or developed into a wider offer. This will offer a digital resource for parents while a wider digital offer is being developed.

**Universal: Incredible Years Babies: 0–1-year-old**

**Tier 1: Incredible Years Toddler: 1-3 years old**

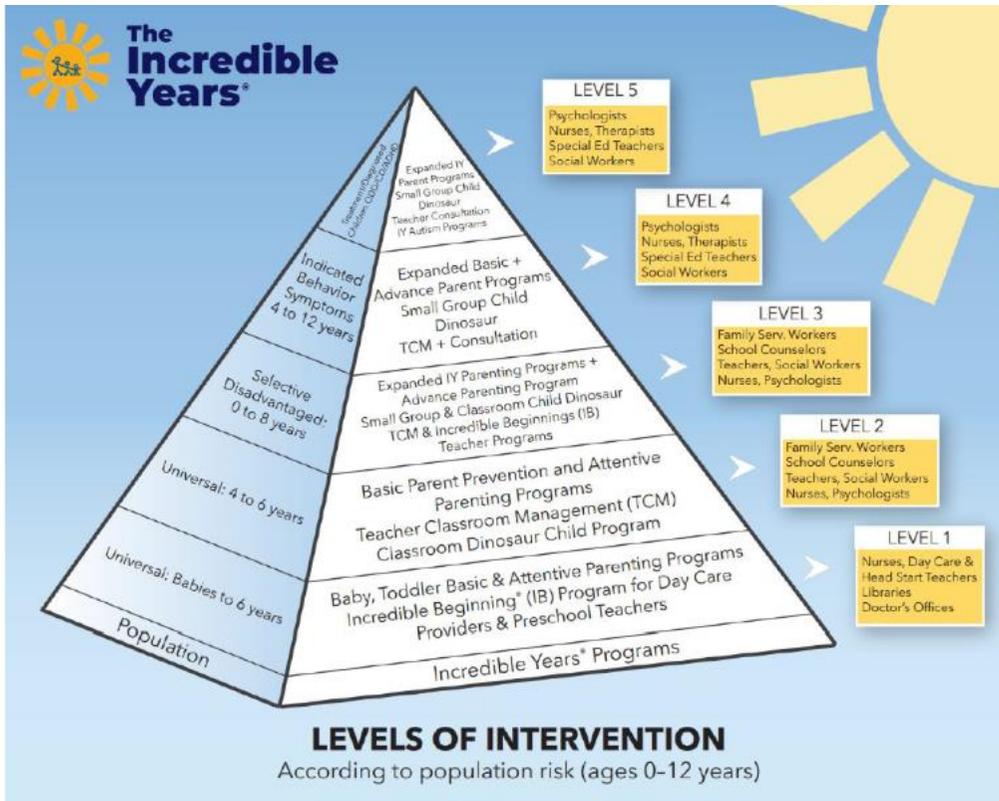
**Tier 2: Incredible Years preschool: 3-6 years old**

**Tier 3: Incredible Years Advance**

**Incredible Years School Age 6–12-year-olds**

**Triple P online access – Direct professional referral**

Following the Incredible Years parenting model for a consistent and city-wide model.



## Finance

Parenting programme funding is being provided as part of the core budget allocated for the BSILFH. DFE identified evidence-based interventions are the only programmes that can be funded with this specific allocation.

- Year one £107,400
- Year two £108,700
- Year three £113,500

## Appendix 4

### Best Start Family Hubs and Families First

#### Context

Local authorities are currently delivering two major national reform programmes:

- Giving every child the Best start in Life which includes Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies improving access to early years and family support through place-based hubs, digital pathways, and integrated early years services in order to meet the 75% national target for children's education at the end of reception
- Families First – transforming Early Help and Child in Need into a single, multi-agency Family Help system

Both reforms emphasise early support for families.

Families First shifts the system toward earlier intervention to prevent escalation into statutory services.

Best Start Family Hubs should provide a core offer for babies, children and their families with a clear pathway from pregnancy to age 5 and beyond. They must include enhanced SEND support, evidenced based parenting programmes, access to health services for babies and young children and groups and services to support children 's language development, particularly 3- and 4-year-olds. They must be accessible for all families but in areas that reach the most disadvantaged families.

#### How Best Start Family Hubs and Families First Connect

- Both programmes are part of a wider national reform agenda to create a more coherent, joined-up, whole-family support system
- They come from different strands of policy, but in practice they overlap heavily in local delivery
- Although funded and governed separately, the two programmes are highly complementary and are intended to work together
- When aligned effectively, they create a simpler, stronger, and more accessible family support system that improves outcomes and reduces pressure on statutory services
- Shared Vision - Both programmes aim to ensure families receive the right support at the right time, with fewer changes of worker and a more consistent experience.

We are committed to integrating the Best Start Family Hubs programme and the Families First reforms within Southend to maximise the benefits of both programmes. This includes working together to design evidenced based parenting programmes and understanding the current and future offer available.

#### Outcomes required for Best Start Family Hubs:

- Improved School Readiness due to a focus on Learning and Development in groups and services
- Enhanced Language and Communication by providing targeted speech and language activities
- Access to health services from 0-5 and beyond by integrating midwifery and health visiting services in Best Start Family Hubs
- Strengthened Parent-Child Relationships by providing parenting courses, stay-and-play sessions, and relationship advice, reducing the need for intensive intervention.

Both programmes aim to:

- Improve outcomes
- Improve child development
- Strengthen family resilience
- Reduce escalation to statutory services

- Improve multi-agency coordination

### **Key Crossovers**

- Best Start Family Hubs can be an access point for Families First services - Prevention team and Family Help team
- Families First teams can be an access point/signpost for Best Start Family Hubs, and share information about early education and health services offered at Best Start Family Hubs
- Best Start Family Hubs can act as the community base for Family First practitioners and provide a natural base for partners to share spaces and/or co-deliver services depending on space

### **Benefits of Better Integration for Children and Families**

#### For Families

- Streamlined information and access points
- Do not need to keep retelling their story
- Joined up and more consistent plans of support
- Less changes of people offering support

#### For the Local Authority

- More efficient use of resources
- Stronger multi-agency partnerships
- Reduced duplication across programmes
- Meeting need at the lowest possible level

#### For the Workforce

- Clearer pathways
- Shared practice models, language and outcomes
- Improved collaboration
- Services supporting each other better

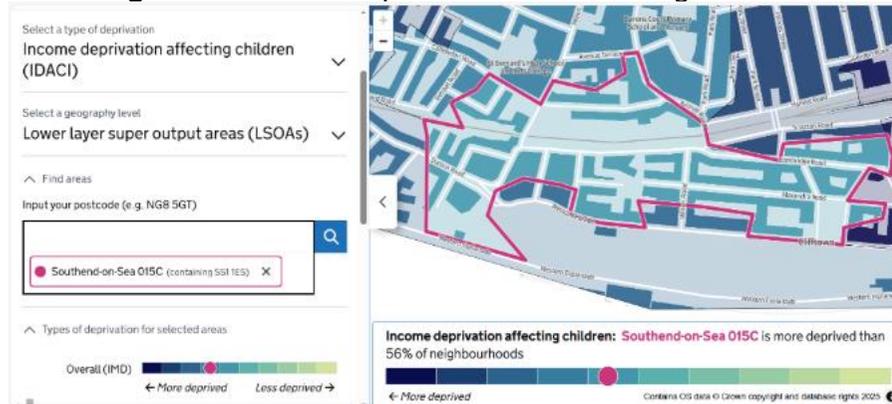
### **Recommendations for Moving Forward**

- Establish joint governance – CPH MT to ensure cross-representation between Best Start Family Hubs and FFP governance structures
- Understanding of requirements and restrictions due to grant funding and agreement on the offer and timescales
- Shared understanding of specific government targets related to grant funding and how to achieve these, such as uptake of 15 hour 2 year old entitlement and GLD for reception age children
- Align transformation programmes - programme leads work to a shared roadmap where possible
- Develop joint workforce strategy opportunities - align training, supervision, and practice models across early years, early help, and Family Help Teams where possible
- Integrate accessibility and pathways - ensure Best Start Family Hubs have an integral role in the community and are valued spaces for families focused on the under 5's but offering services up to 19 where applicable.

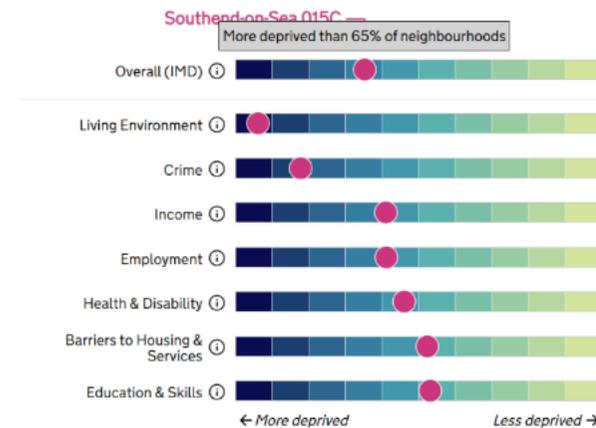
## Appendix 5 Site analysis and ensuring sites meet Best Start Criteria.

### Best Start Family Hubs/Satellites Site Analysis. Meeting Best Start Family Hub Criteria.

#### Cambridge Road – More deprived than 56% of neighbourhoods



The neighbourhood you selected is most deprived in relation to living environment. Only 6% of neighbourhoods in England are more deprived.



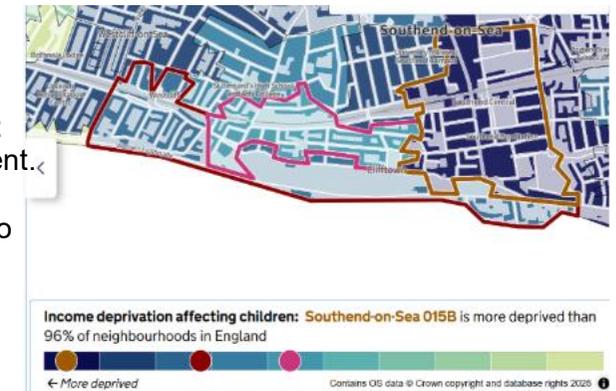
IMD Breakdown:

#### Overall IMD - more deprived than 65% of neighbourhoods

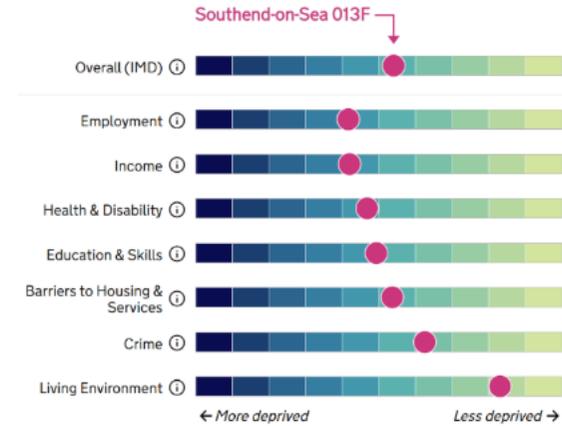
This demonstrates that although Cambridge Road is not in the lowest 30% overall (the 2025 IMD shows that it is, there are **two key indicators that are within the lowest 30% - Living Environment and Crime**. These will have a significant impact on aspirations, safety and Home Learning Environment.

**Context for Cambridge Road** – next to areas of much higher deprivation

Cambridge Road Family Centre is the area mapped in pink on the bottom of the map. The area next to it in brown is **more deprived than 96% of neighbourhoods** and the area below it in maroon is **more deprived than 72% of neighbourhoods**.



**Friars – More deprived than 51% of neighbourhoods**

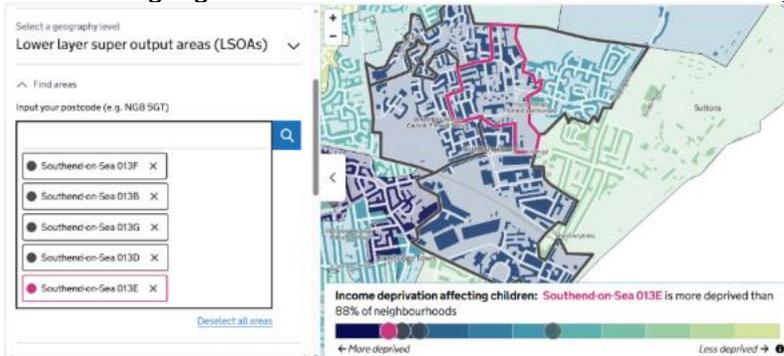


**IMD Breakdown:**

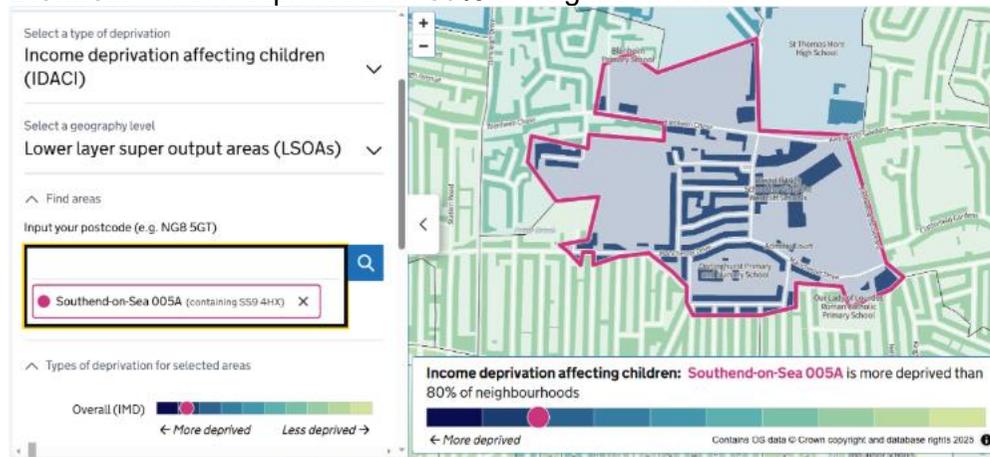
**Context for Friars** – next to areas of much higher deprivation

Friars Family Centre is the area mapped in black on the top right of the map. The area next to it in pink is **more deprived than 88% of neighbourhoods**

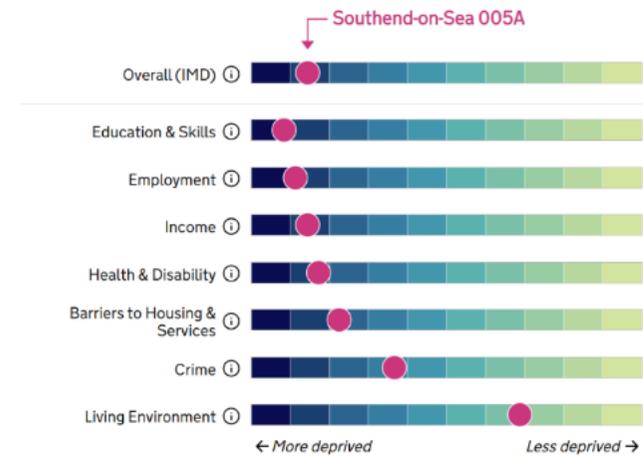
All areas highlighted in blacks/browns to the left of the Family Centre area are all more deprived than 80% of neighbourhoods.



## Blenheim - More deprived than 80% of neighbourhoods



The neighbourhood you selected is most deprived in relation to education & skills. Only 8% of neighbourhoods in England are more deprived.



Overall (IMD) - 86% of neighbourhoods in England are less deprived (ranked 4,871 out of 33,755 neighbourhoods).