

Report to CABINET

Oldham Strategy - Giving every child the best start in life

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Shaid Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

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23 February 2026

Reason for Decision

The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet's agreement to:

- accept the funding allocated to Oldham by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) for delivery of years 5-7 of the Best Start in Life Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme (formerly the Family Hub and Start for Life Programme)
- delegate decision-making authority for the detailed allocation of this funding to the Executive Director Children and Young People in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Director of Finance, with the input of partners through the Family Hubs Board
- approve the attached Best Start in Life delivery plan for Oldham, submit this to the DfE and publish it on the Council website before the deadline of 31 March 2026 in accordance with national guidance.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

-
- Approve acceptance of the £5,633,300 funding allocated to Oldham for 2026/27 by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) for delivery of years 5-7 of the Best Start in Life Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme (formerly the Family Hub and Start for Life Programme)
 - Approve delegation of authority for the detailed allocation of this funding to the Executive Director Children and Young People in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Director of Finance, with the input of partners through the Family Hubs Board
 - Approve the attached Best Start in Life delivery plan for Oldham, and that this be submitted to the DfE and published before the deadline of 31 March 2026 in accordance with national guidance.

1 Background

- 1.1 Oldham is committed to ensuring that every child has the strongest possible start in life, recognising that the foundations for lifelong health, learning and development are laid in the earliest years. This ambition directly reflects the priorities set out in Oldham's Corporate Plan, which positions *Healthier, Happier Lives* as a core goal for the borough. The Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies programme is a key mechanism through which Oldham will deliver on this ambition, ensuring children and families receive the right support at the right time.

As we move towards the national launch of Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies programme from April 2026, it is essential that Oldham can clearly demonstrate how it is preparing to deliver a high-quality, integrated early years offer. This preparation aligns strongly with the Corporate Plan's four organisational pillars:

- Efficiency and value for money: The programme's multi-year investment will be used to maximise impact across the system, ensuring resources are targeted where they make the greatest difference
- Capacity building: Funding will strengthen local infrastructure, workforce capability and partnership arrangements, supporting sustainable delivery now and in future years
- Digital: the development of a more integrated early years system will rely on improved data, digital tools and shared intelligence to understand need and track outcomes
- Prevention and early help: the programme is fundamentally preventative, reducing demand on statutory services by supporting families earlier and more effectively

Together, these pillars provide the organisational conditions needed for Oldham to deliver a responsive and outcomes focused early years system.

1.2 Programme Investment

Annual allocations for the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies programme are as follows:

| | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | 2028/29 | Total |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Delivery Grant - programme | £496,300 | £405,800 | £416,700 | £1,318,800 |
| Delivery Grant - capital | £99,300 | £101,200 | £103,200 | £303,700 |
| Parenting Support | £342,700 | £347,000 | £362,200 | £1,051,900 |
| Home Learning Environment | £258,500 | £261,700 | £273,200 | £793,400 |
| Perinatal Mental Health / Parent-Infant Relationships | £460,100 | £460,100 | £460,100 | £1,380,300 |
| Infant Feeding | £235,700 | £235,700 | £235,700 | £707,100 |
| Start for Life / Parent Carer Panels | £26,200 | £26,200 | £26,200 | £78,600 |
| Total | £1,918,800 | £1,837,700 | £1,877,300 | £5,633,300 |

The investment will support:

- Delivery of Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies programme
- Development and implementation of Oldham's Best Start Local Plan
- Delivery of core services, including evidence-based parenting and home learning environment support interventions

1.3 Contribution to Corporate Priorities

The programme will make a direct contribution to the Corporate Plan's three overarching goals:

- Healthier, Happier Lives: By improving early childhood development, strengthening parent-infant relationships and supporting perinatal mental health
- A Great Place to Live: By ensuring families can access high-quality, joined-up support in their local communities
- Green and Growing: By building resilient, thriving communities where children are supported to reach their potential and contribute to Oldham's long-term prosperity

1.4 Local Targets and System Leadership

The programme is central to Oldham's contribution to the national ambition of 75% of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028. Oldham's statutory local targets have now been agreed:

- 72.6% of all children achieving a GLD
- 61.8% of all children eligible for free schools meals achieving a GLD

Achieving these outcomes will require a coordinated, system-wide approach across health, education and community services, fully aligned with the Corporate Plan's emphasis on strong leadership, partnership working and continuous improvement.

2 Current Position

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- 2.1 The programme team have undertaken substantial preparatory work in anticipation of the national launch of Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies from April 2026. Partners from across health, education, early years and the VCSE sector are engaged and supportive of developing a boroughwide approach, and there is a shared recognition of the scale of change required to meet Oldham’s statutory GLD targets for 2028 (72.6% overall; 61.8% FSM).

A substantial amount of groundwork has already taken place, both in preparation for the launch of BSIL and through the ongoing Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. Work has begun to map existing Family Help pathways, strengthen multi-agency working within Family Hubs, and develop district-level sufficiency and demand profiles. Early discussions are also underway to align governance structures, agree shared outcomes and KPIs, and establish the data-sharing arrangements needed to support integrated delivery across the system.

A Best Start in Life Strategic and Operational Plan has now been developed to bring this work together into a single, coherent framework. The plan sets out a phased delivery model, including the establishment of core system foundations and district-level piloting to test new approaches to outreach, early identification, attendance monitoring, Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) uptake and integrated working. Preparatory scoping for district pilots is underway, but implementation cannot begin until the plan is formally approved.

At this stage, planning is ready to move into structured delivery but requires Cabinet approval to proceed. Approval of the plan will provide the mandate needed to align partners, mobilise resources, and begin Stage 1 implementation, ensuring Oldham can demonstrate readiness for the national programme and make progress towards its statutory GLD targets.

Delivery of the plan will be driven through a multi-agency Best Start in Life Board, co-chaired by the Directors of Children’s Social Care and Early Help and the Director of Education and Early Years, overseen by the Prevention and Early Help Pillar Change Board chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive (People). The Best Start in Life Board will replace the existing Family Hubs Board by bringing together governance around the Family Hubs and Early Years strands of the Best Start in Life programme. It will also enable delivery to be co-ordinated with inter-connected activity such as the Families First Partnership Programme.

3 **Options/Alternatives**

- 3.1 **Option One:** To approve the Best Start in Life plan and the delegated authority required to manage the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies grant funding for 2026–2029.
- 3.2 **Option Two:** Not to approve the Best Start in Life plan and the delegated authority for managing the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies grant funding for 2026–2029.

4 **Preferred Option**

- 4.1 **Option One:** to approve the Best Start in Life plan and the delegated authority required to manage the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies grant funding for 2026–2029. This approach provides the strongest and most efficient route forward, ensuring Oldham meets

the DfE publication deadline of 31 March 2026 and is able to move into structured delivery without delay.

Approval will give the programme a clear mandate, enabling partners to align activity, mobilise resources and begin Stage 1 implementation, including the district pilots and the development of core system infrastructure. This will support Oldham's readiness for the national launch in April 2026 and maintain momentum towards achieving the statutory GLD targets.

The decision is within the Council's existing budget and policy framework, and no additional Council approval is required beyond Cabinet agreement.

There is a risk that by not approving progression of the Best Start in Life plan and delegated authority, publication could miss the DfE deadline of 31 March 2026 and programme delivery could be delayed due to prolonged budget-approval processes.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 The plan has been discussed with the multi-agency Family Hubs Board, Chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help. Regular consultation and co-production is completed by Family Hub Parent Panels.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The report is seeking approval to formally accept the funding allocated to Oldham by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) for delivery of years 5 to 7 of the Best Start in Life Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme (formerly the Family Hub and Start for Life Programme), for the three financial years 2026/27 to 2028/29, with a total value of £5,633,300. The annual allocations are summarised in the table below, with a detailed breakdown of the components of the grant being provided at section 1.2 in the main body of the report:

| Grant Allocation | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | 2028/29 | Total |
|------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Total | £1,918,800 | £1,837,700 | £1,877,300 | £5,633,300 |

- 6.2 The report also seeks approval to delegate decision-making authority for the detailed allocation of the funding to the Executive Director Children and Young People in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Director of Finance, with the input of partners through the Best Start in Life Board and, in accordance with national requirements, to submit the Best Start in Life delivery plan for Oldham to the DfE before the deadline of 31 March 2026 and to publish this on the Council website. Delivery of the plan is overseen by the Family Hubs Board and is subject to rigorous monitoring by the Council, encompassing both service performance and financial compliance. Regular engagement with the Department for Education ensures that all activities remain within the agreed scope and budget throughout the programme's duration.

Andy Cooper, Senior Finance Manager

7 **Legal and Procurement Implications**

7.1 The council may lawfully accept the grant funding on the basis that the council proposes to allocate funds in line with the objects of the government's programme. The Strategic Plan includes the Operational Plan which indicates there will be a variety of delivery routes. These will include using funds in procurement requiring varying existing contracts or making direct awards all for which individual legal assessments shall be required as to lawfulness, though we do not anticipate legal obstacles being identified. Where onwards grants are made these would require State Subsidy assessments if to external enterprises. Bryan Boese Solicitor Oldham Council.

8. **Procurement Implications**

8.1 Included above.

9 **Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People**

9.1 The Best Start in Life Plan will deliver improved outcomes for children and young people. There are no adverse implications for groups with any protected characteristic.

10 **Key Decision**

10.1 Yes

11 **Key Decision Reference**

11.1 CHS-04-25

12 **Background Papers**

12.1 The following is a list of background papers on which this report is based in accordance with the requirements of Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972. It does not include documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information as defined by the Act:

None

13 **Appendices**

13.1 Appendix A: Oldham Best Start in Life Strategic and Operational Plan

Appendix 1

Oldham Best Start in Life Strategic Plan

1. Executive Summary

Purpose of the Plan

This plan sets out Oldham's approach to delivering the Department for Education's Best Start in Life (BSiL) ambition. It brings together the work already underway across the borough to strengthen early childhood outcomes and sets a clear, systemwide strategy for improving the factors that contribute to a Good Level of Development (GLD) at age five.

Oldham has significant levels of poverty and inequality, but it also has a strong, committed workforce and a shared determination across partners to improve outcomes for all children. This plan outlines how we will build on these strengths to break cycles of disadvantage and ensure every child has the foundations for lifelong health, learning, and wellbeing.

National Ambition and Local Responsibility

The national ambition for 75% of children to achieve a GLD by 2028 provides the framework within which local authorities must act. Achieving this ambition requires local systems to address the structural and social barriers that affect children's development, particularly in areas with high deprivation.

Local authorities are responsible for:

- Leading strategic planning across the early years system
- Ensuring access to high-quality education and childcare
- Commissioning and coordinating family support
- Driving improvements in early years practice and workforce capability
- Working collaboratively with health, education, and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector

In Oldham, this responsibility includes convening partners, aligning ambitions, and embedding BSiL as a boroughwide priority.

Oldham's Statutory GLD Targets

This plan sets out Oldham's approach through to 2029, providing a clear, long-term framework for system improvement while working towards the statutory 2028 GLD targets set within the national ambition.

Oldham must meet two statutory targets by 2028:

- 72.6% of all children achieving a Good Level of Development

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- 61.8% of children eligible for free school meals achieving a Good Level of Development

Meeting these targets will require coordinated action across the whole system. This plan outlines how Oldham will mobilise partners, align resources, and strengthen early years pathways to meet the 2028 targets while sustaining progress into 2029 and beyond.

Key Priorities

Oldham's Best Start in Life plan is structured around three national priority areas:

1. Better support for families
2. More accessible early education and childcare
3. Improving quality in early years, including Reception

These priorities shape the actions, governance, and workforce development set out in this document.

What Will Be Different for Families by 2029

By 2029, families in Oldham will experience:

- Earlier, more joined-up support from pregnancy to age five
- Improved access to high quality early education and childcare
- More consistent, confident early years practice across all settings
- Clearer pathways, stronger relationships, and reduced inequalities

Our ambition is that more children enter school ready to learn, ready to engage, and ready to succeed.

2. Introduction and National Context

Overview of the BSiL Programme

The DfE BSiL programme sets a national direction for improving early childhood outcomes. It focuses on strengthening support for families, improving access to early education and childcare, and raising the quality of early years provision. The programme recognises that the first five years are critical for shaping lifelong outcomes and that reducing inequalities in these early experiences is essential for improving population-level health, learning, and wellbeing.

Funding and System Alignment

Delivery of the BSiL ambition is underpinned by the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme, which has received increased investment and a confirmed three-year funding

allocation. The programme is now being rebranded nationally as *Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies*, reflecting its strengthened focus on early childhood and infant wellbeing.

While this funding is a key enabler, BSIL is not a standalone programme. Its success depends on coordinated contributions from a range of partners (including early years providers and schools, health partners such as midwifery, health visitors and speech and language specialists and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector organisations) as well as alignment with other complementary national and regional programmes:

- Families First Partnership which is a national programme of reform of family help and children's safeguarding arrangements;
- Live Well which is a Greater Manchester programme aiming to deliver great everyday support in every neighbourhood, through a shift in how public services work with people and communities.

Viewing BSIL as a system-wide priority ensures that investment, workforce capability, and service transformation are aligned across the whole early years landscape, not confined to Family Hubs alone.

Oldham's Vision for BSIL

'Every child in Oldham grows up healthy, happy and ready to learn, supported by services that give families the right help at the right time, so every child gets the best possible start in life'

Governance

This plan will report into the Best Start in Life Board (formerly the Family Hubs Board) for oversight and accountability, with clear accountability to the Director of Education and the Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help, and will also feed into the relevant governance channels across education and early help.

3. Overview of the Delivery Approach

Oldham's BSiL programme sets out a clear, phased roadmap to strengthen the early years system, improve access to early education, and enhance the quality of provision.

The delivery model is structured into three stages:

- Stage 1 – Foundations and Boroughwide Test-and Learn
- Stage 2 – Embedding and Expansion
- Stage 3 – Scale Up and Sustainability

Each stage builds on the previous one, ensuring that Oldham strengthens its system infrastructure, develops its workforce, and improves pathways before expanding delivery.

4. Stage 1 – Foundations and Boroughwide Test-and-Learn (April 2026 – January 2027)

Stage 1 establishes the essential building blocks of a coherent early years system. It focuses on shared principles, pathway mapping, early identification, communication, data foundations, alongside the introduction of a boroughwide test-and-learn model to trial and refine new approaches across all districts. This ensures that improvements are implemented at pace, learning is captured quickly, and effective practice is spread consistently across the system.

4.1 Strengthening Family Help and Early Identification

The first priority is to create a shared, consistent approach to Family Help across the early years system. This begins with defining 'The Oldham Way' - a set of shared principles, language and expectations that all partners will use when working with families.

Mapping Family Help pathways from pregnancy to age five will identify duplication, gaps and opportunities to streamline support. This work will shape Oldham's early years model with a clear focus on strengthening the universal offer of preventative family help. Working in partnership with the Families First programme will ensure that families can access appropriate support and intervention across the full spectrum of need, from universal to targeted and specialist.

Targeted information for families will be developed, particularly around parenting, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), speech delay, child development and early learning. This will help reduce anxiety, improve parental understanding and confidence, and support early help-seeking.

Strengthening the antenatal - health visiting - Family Hub pathway will ensure smooth transitions, continuity of support and earlier identification of emerging needs, complementing Greater Manchester Combined Authority's focus on prevention and early intervention.

4.2 Boroughwide Test-and-Learn Model

Oldham will adopt a boroughwide test-and-learn model to strengthen Family Help, improve access to early education, and enhance integrated working across the early years system. All districts will implement the same core components from the outset, with flexibility to adapt approaches based on local need. Learning will be captured through rapid review cycles and used to refine delivery across the system.

This approach enables Oldham to make progress at pace, ensure consistency for families, and spread effective practice quickly across the borough.

What the test-and-learn model will focus on

1. Assertive outreach model (utilising Ages and Stages Questionnaire data and other existing datasets)
2. Integrated district meetings
3. Attendance monitoring in Private, Voluntary, and Independent settings
4. EYPP identification and use
5. Birth rate mapping
6. Early identification pathways

How learning will be captured and used

- Engagement rates
- Attendance improvements
- EYPP take-up
- Family Hub engagement
- Family Hub interventions
- Early identification outcomes
- GLD trajectory data
- Qualitative feedback from families and practitioners

Insights from these reviews will inform continuous improvement across all districts, ensuring that Oldham's early years system evolves in real time and remains responsive to local need.

4.3 Improving Access to Early Education and Childcare

District-level sufficiency and demand profiling will identify gaps in provision. Multilingual, plain-English information will be developed to support families' understanding of entitlements.

A simple tracking system will compare eligibility with actual take-up, enabling targeted follow-up with families who are not engaging. Existing work with schools to improve Reception attendance will be scaled up, with a particular focus on children whose attendance falls below 90%. Options for more intensive, targeted interventions for pupils with attendance below 50% will be explored later in the programme. Alongside this, a new pilot will begin to capture and monitor attendance in PVI settings, strengthening our understanding of patterns across the whole early years sector.

Birth rate mapping will be used to identify children not accessing any early years provision, enabling targeted and assertive outreach.

4.4 Workforce and Quality Foundations

Work will begin to explore how potential initiatives on toilet training and school readiness could be developed, including assessing their feasibility, design and likely impact within target settings. This scoping activity will inform whether and how these initiatives should be taken forward as part of the wider early years offer.

This work will lay the foundations for an Oldham Early Years Workforce Strategy. Identified in stage 3 of this plan and building on the GMCA Competency Framework.

4.5 Data, Governance and System Leadership

Stage 1 will establish the foundations for a strong performance and governance framework. This includes agreeing shared outcomes and key performance indicators (KPI's)PI's, implementing data sharing agreements, developing district-level profiles of needs and assets, and embedding regular reporting cycles to the BSiL Board.

Work will begin on the BSiL Dashboard to support reporting and accountability, which will bring together data on GLD, attendance, mandated checks, Family Hub engagement and early identification and intervention.

5. Stage 2 – Embedding and Expansion (February 2027 – March 2029)

Stage 2 focuses on embedding consistent practice across Oldham, informed by learning from the boroughwide test-and-learn activity delivered in stage 1.

5.1 Family Help and Early Identification

The system will focus on strengthening universal early intervention across the early years pathway, ensuring families receive support at the earlier opportunity. This work will remain closely connected to the emerging 'One Plan, One Approach' developments within the Families First programme, maintaining alignment and awareness so that universal activity complements the wider model for targeted and specialist family help.

Family Hubs teams will be supported to meet mandated checks and link families to support earlier. A multilingual digital offer will be developed, including QR code pathways, social media content and online resources, with offline alternatives for families experiencing digital exclusion.

This stage will also begin working on a consistent approach to early identification, ensuring that SEND and developmental concerns around communication are picked up earlier and responded to through coordinated Family Help.

5.2 Access to Early Education and Childcare

A boroughwide strategy will be developed to close the gap between eligibility and take-up of entitlements. This will include targeted and assertive outreach, improved communication across partners, and closer working with PVI's and schools.

SEND navigation will be improved through closer working between Local Inclusion Support Officers SEND Practitioners and Oldham's Better Communication Team, supporting parents to understand and accept emerging needs. Work will also begin to address transport and access barriers, including exploring flexible hours and extended provision within Family Hubs.

5.3 Workforce and Quality

A coordinated training offer will be developed to build shared knowledge and understanding across Oldham's workforce. Its delivery and impact will be strengthened through the early years workforce strategies set out in stage 3 of this plan.

This stage will also develop and build on existing best practice forums and support settings to improve transitions into school.

5.4 Data and Governance

The BSiL Dashboard will be launched, enabling real-time monitoring of progress. Governance structures across Family Hubs, Early Years Boards and Section 75 arrangements will be aligned to reduce duplication and clarify decision-making.

This stage will also embed district-level performance reviews, ensuring that local intelligence informs boroughwide strategy.

6. Stage 3 – Boroughwide Scale Up and Sustainability (October 2027 – March 2029)

Stage 3 focuses on boroughwide implementation and long-term sustainability.

6.1 Family Help

The focus will be on strengthening universal early intervention across all districts, ensuring families receive support at the earliest opportunity. This work will remain closely connected to the emerging 'One Plan, One Approach' developments within the Families First partnership, maintaining alignment without duplicating activity. Assertive outreach will continue to be a key feature, with targeted attention on neighbourhoods experiencing the highest levels of deprivation so that families who are least likely to engage receive proactive, timely support.

6.2 Access to Early Education and Childcare

Where sufficiency gaps are identified, work will begin to develop new nursery places in school-based and community settings in line with DfE guidance to be announced in 2026. Building on the earlier pilot attendance monitoring across PVI and schools will be scaled up with sustained outreach continuing to families not accessing provision.

6.3 Workforce and Quality

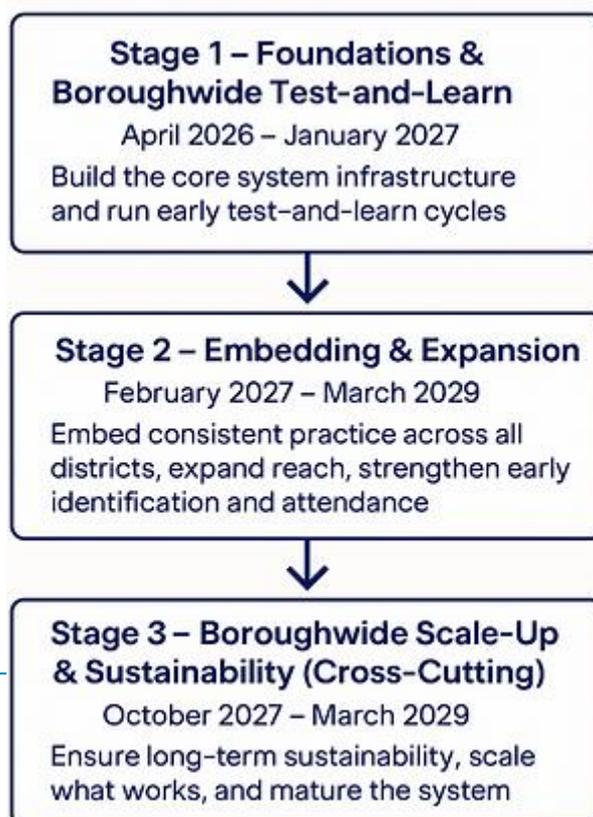
A full Early Years Workforce Strategy will be co-produced, setting out a shared vision for skills, training, recruitment and retention. A recommended suite of online training options will be developed, and a retention and recognition plan will be implemented to support workforce stability.

6.4 Data and Governance

Data will be used to drive continuous improvement, highlight areas that are off-track and inform where support is targeted. As richer data becomes available, and in line with DfE's test-and-learn approach, our targeting will adapt in real time to emerging needs and insights.

7. Programme Timeline

The diagram below brings the full delivery timeline together, showing how the phases connect, where they overlap, and how learning feeds forward into the next stage. It provides a clear view of the overall flow of the programme, the timing, duration and purpose of each phase, and supports a shared understanding of how the system will move from mobilisation to boroughwide impact. A more detailed breakdown of the timeline is available in the appendix.



8. Evidence-Based Interventions

Oldham will scale three core Evidence-Based Interventions (EBIs) with strong evidence of impact:

Making it REAL

- The programme is currently delivered in Oldham schools, with 72% of participating children achieving GLD and 90% of parents reporting increased confidence, knowledge and ability to support early reading and writing at home.
- Delivery in schools will be expanded from the 2026/27 academic year, supported by a newly trained cohort of trainers working alongside school staff. Expansion will prioritise outreach to children most in need, particularly those in communities we have not yet reached or who face barriers to accessing early years provision.
- This approach ensures that expansion is not only about increasing numbers, but also about improving equity and directing support where it will have the greatest impact.
- A new cohort of Quality and Vulnerable Children Practitioners will be trained to deliver Making it REAL in PVI settings, strengthening early literacy and improving school readiness for transition into Reception.

Togetherness (formerly Solihull)

- Togetherness provides an evidence-based framework that strengthens practitioners' understanding of children's emotional development, behaviour, and relationships, supporting more consistent and trauma-informed practice across Oldham's early years system.
- Training PVI staff in Togetherness will build workforce confidence and capability, improve early identification and early intervention, and enhance the quality of relationships with families - directly supporting BSiL priorities around early help, quality improvement, workforce development, and improved outcomes from conception to age five.
- A system-wide process will identify colleagues best placed to train as Togetherness facilitators, ensuring representation from a range of teams so that BSiL principles are embedded consistently across services.
- Capacity will be scaled up from the current two trainers to a cohort of six to eight, achieved by freeing capacity within existing roles rather than creating new posts. Although capacity is a challenge, this approach demonstrates system commitment and enables sustainable delivery at scale.

Triple P

- Triple P is an evidence-based parenting programme that supports families to build confidence, strengthen relationships, and develop positive strategies to manage children's behaviour and emotional development. It contributes directly to Best Start in Life priorities around early help, family support, and improving outcomes from conception to age five.
- Triple P is currently delivered across Oldham's early years system, providing consistent, strengths-based support for families and helping to reduce escalation of need through early intervention.

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- During 2024/25, the programme supported around 190 parents and carers, with strong engagement and positive feedback on improved confidence, understanding and home routines.
 - We are now looking to increase reach, with a focus on engaging families who may not currently access parenting support, including those in communities with lower take-up or who face barriers to early years provision. This ensures expansion is focused on equity, impact and strengthening early relationships.

Strengthening Parental Confidence Through Play-Based Learning

In addition to these established evidence-based programmes, Oldham will also explore and agree a further intervention focused on strengthening the skills and confidence of parents in supporting their children's development through play. This work will build on existing strengths within the system and respond to feedback from families and practitioners about the importance of play-based learning in the early years. The intervention will be co-designed with partners to ensure it is accessible, culturally relevant and aligned with Oldham's wider BSiL priorities, with a particular focus on supporting families who may benefit most from additional guidance and encouragement.

9. Monitoring and Performance

A new BSiL Dashboard will track:

- GLD outcomes
- Free School Meals GLD differentials in relation to whether children receive free school meals, gender and ethnicity
- Take-up of entitlements
- Mandated checks
- Family Hub engagement
- Family Hub interventions
- Workforce training

Quarterly reporting will be provided to the BSiL Board, with district level reviews and an annual refresh of the plan.

10. Summary

This plan provides a clear, coherent and achievable roadmap for delivering Oldham's BSiL local plans. It strengthens system leadership, ensures families receive the right help at the right time, and aligns with wider reforms.

It is ambitious but grounded in evidence, and it reflects Oldham's commitment to giving every child the best possible start.

Appendix: Oldham Best Start in Life Operational Plan

This operational plan provides the detailed delivery framework that underpins Oldham's BSiL Strategic Plan. It is intended for internal planning and coordination across partners, setting out the practical actions, responsibilities and sequencing required to deliver the ambitions agreed at a strategic level. By presenting this alongside the strategic plan, Oldham can demonstrate both a clear vision and a credible, phased approach to implementation.

The plan is deliberately iterative. In line with Department for Education guidance, operational delivery will continue to evolve as new data, insight and learning emerge, particularly from the boroughwide test-and-learn approach, strengthened performance reporting, and improved early identification pathways. Some areas of the plan are already well developed, while others will mature over time as the system builds capability, tests new approaches and refines its targeting. This ensures that Oldham's delivery model remains responsive, evidence-informed and focused on achieving the statutory GLD targets by 2028 and sustaining progress into 2029 and beyond.

Delivery of the operational plan will build on a mix of existing internal arrangements and externally commissioned activity already in place within the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. Several elements of the current model are delivered through contracts that have recently been extended, or are in the process of being extended, to ensure continuity while the system prepares for a more coordinated and well-sequenced recommissioning process. These extensions support us to align delivery timelines, strengthen specifications, and move towards a more organised tendering approach across the early years system. Additional activity continues to be delivered through established partnership arrangements, including those operating under the Section 75 agreement. As the commissioning landscape evolves, future iterations of the plan will set out where onward grants or new procurement activity are required, providing clarity for Procurement and Legal colleagues and supporting a smooth transition to the next phase of delivery.

Stage 1

| Theme | Step/Action | Purpose/Outcome | Lead/Key Partners |
|--------------------|---|--|--|
| Family Help | Agree and define the “Oldham Way” for BSiL (shared principles, language, and core offer). | Create a consistent, system-wide approach and message for families and professionals. | System wide: LA Early Years, Public Health, NHS, VCSE, Comms |
| Family Help | Map current family support pathways from pregnancy to age 5 (incl. midwives, HVs, hubs, SEND, PVI, school). | Identify gaps, overlaps, and opportunities for “one assessment, one plan” and smoother transitions | System wide: LA, NHS, PVI, Schools, VCSE |
| Family Help | Design targeted information/resources on ADHD, speech delay, child development for families. | Improve parental understanding and reduce anxiety/delay in seeking support. | Public Health, SEND, BCT, Comms |
| Access & Childcare | Complete detailed district-level sufficiency and demand profiling | Understand where provision and access gaps are, to target action. | LA EY, Planning, Housing, Providers |
| Access & Childcare | Develop multi-lingual, plain English information about entitlements and where to get support. | Make the offer understandable and accessible to all families. | Comms, LA EY, VCSE |
| Access & Childcare | Build a simple tracking system for children eligible vs. actually taking up places. | Allow targeted follow-up with non-engaging families. | Data team, LA EY |

| Theme | Step/Action | Purpose/Outcome | Lead/Key Partners |
|-------------------|--|--|-------------------------------|
| Data & Governance | Agree core BSIL outcomes and KPIs across partners (health, EY, hubs, VCSE, housing). | Create a shared accountability framework for Best Start. | BSIL Board, All partners |
| Data & Governance | Agree and implement data sharing agreements and processes where necessary | Allow safe, lawful, and useful data sharing between agencies. | IG leads, Legal, Data team |
| Data & Governance | Complete district-level profiles using shared data (need, assets, provision, Family Hubs DPIA). | Inform targeted outreach, sufficiency, and workforce planning. | Data team, District leads |
| Data & Governance | Embed regular performance reporting cycles to BSIL Board and key partnerships. | Keep progress visible and adjust course where needed. | Programme Manager, BSIL Board |
| Data & Governance | Review and align existing governance (Family Hubs, Section 75, EY boards) with BSIL. | Reduce duplication and clarify decision-making. | Senior leaders, Governance |
| Data & Governance | Support Family Hub teams to act on ASQ data identifying children not accessing settings, initially targeting 2-2.5 ASQ cohort for 2028 GLD | Make outreach and messaging more targeted and effective, supporting outreach teams with data | Data team, Family Hubs, LA EY |

Stage 1 – Boroughwide Test-and-Learn

| Theme | Step/Action | Purpose/Outcome | Lead/Key Partners |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| Family Help | Co-design with partners an assertive outreach model (door-knocking, targeted offers, literacy champions). | Reach families we aren't reaching and increase engagement in hubs and early education. | Family Hubs, VCSE, Community orgs |
| Family Help | Strengthen antenatal pathway: midwife → HV → Family Hub transition | Ensure support starts pre-birth and families experience continuity. | Maternity, HV, Family Hubs |
| Family Help | Set up regular multi-agency district meetings around each Family Hub. | Enable integrated district delivery and local problem-solving. | LA, NHS, VCSE, Schools |
| Family Help | Create an approach for involving wider carers (grandparents, siblings) in messages and workshops. | Extend reach of safeguarding and early learning messages. | Family Hubs, VCSE, Schools |
| Family Help | Establish outreach and community-based enrolment/support sessions (in hubs, libraries, community centres). | Make it easier for families to apply and ask questions locally. | Family Hubs, PVI, VCSE, District co-ordinators |
| Access & Childcare | Identify and address transport/access barriers (e.g. local travel schemes, clustering provision, flexible hours). | Reduce practical barriers to children attending provision. | LA Transport, EY, Providers |
| Access & Childcare | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify children with 90% or lower attendance in school-based nurseries Pilot attendance monitoring in PVI settings requesting at same time as sufficiency/census data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve early years attendance Strengthen school readiness and early identification of needs Reduce risk of children missing key developmental opportunities | LA Early Years Team School-based nurseries PVI settings Family Hubs |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide targeted support to families | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on learning gathered through pilot in South Oldham starting in Jan 2026 | |
| Access & Childcare | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a working group with sector reps • Create simple guidance for settings and parents • Improve identification and communication of EYPP eligibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase EYPP take-up • Ensure children receive the additional support they are entitled to • Strengthen equity across early years provision | LA Early Years Team PVI and school settings Sector representatives Comms / Family Hubs |
| Quality & Workforce | Work with partners to understand the shared benefits of increasing EYPP uptake to support both the PVI sector and GLD | Establish partnership approach to increasing uptake of EYPP and reporting into LA to support sustained development | LA Early Years Team PVI and school settings Sector representatives |
| Access & Childcare | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map annual birth rate (~3,300) against early years attendance • Identify children not accessing any provision • Target outreach through Family Hubs and partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach families who may be isolated or vulnerable • Increase early engagement in early years provision • Support early identification and intervention | LA Early Years Team Public Health Family Hubs Health Visiting & Midwifery |
| Data & Governance | Design and build the BSIL dashboard (GLD, take-up, EYPP, hub engagement, health checks). | Enable regular tracking and transparent reporting. | Data team, LA EY, NHS |
| Family Help | Review existing analytical data on the current use of Oldham's digital offer, working with professionals | Increase uptake of Oldham's existing digital offer, reaching families we are not currently | LA EY, NHS, Family Hubs, Positive Steps |

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| | across the sector to ensure consistent understanding and messaging around digital options, and with families to ensure information is relevant and accessible | reaching to support development from conception to 5 | |
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Stage 1 – Evidence-based Interventions (EBIs)

| EBI | Rationale | Plans |
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| The Solihull Approach/Togetherness | The Solihull Approach is an evidence-based framework that helps practitioners understand children’s emotional development, behaviour, and relationships. Training PVI staff in the Solihull Approach will strengthen Oldham’s early years workforce, support trauma-informed and consistent practice across the system, improve early identification and early intervention, and enhance relationships with families. This directly supports Best Start in Life priorities around early help, quality improvement, workforce development, and improving outcomes for children from conception to age five. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work across the system to identify colleagues best placed to be trained in delivery of Solihull – these colleagues should come from a range of teams to demonstrate alignment of priorities and embed BSIL practices system wide • Scaling up current provision from 2 trainers to between 6-8, with capacity freed up within existing roles as opposed to new positions created. Capacity is a challenge but this will demonstrate commitment from the system |

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| <p>Making it Real</p> | <p>Making it REAL is an evidence-based early literacy programme designed to strengthen the home learning environment through home visits, workshops, and community events. Training PVI practitioners in this approach will enhance early literacy, deepen relationships with families, support early identification of emerging needs, and build a confident, skilled workforce. This aligns directly with Oldham’s Best Start in Life priorities, particularly around early intervention, family engagement, workforce development, and improving GLD outcomes.</p> <p>The programme will run as a two-year project with schools, beginning in September 2026 and continuing until July 2028. Practitioners across schools and early years settings will complete a two-day training programme, enabling them to deliver the Making it REAL home learning intervention within their own setting.</p> <p>Evidence from previous delivery shows strong impact: 72% of children who take part go on to achieve a Good Level of Development, and 90% of parents report increased confidence, knowledge, and ability to support their child’s early reading and writing at home. These outcomes demonstrate the programme’s effectiveness</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We currently reach around 80 children each year through the existing model, and the intention is to replicate and expand this offer so that more families benefit from high-quality early literacy support. As part of the scale-up, we will prioritise targeted outreach to children who are most in need of support, particularly those living in communities we have not yet reached or who face barriers to accessing early years provision. This will ensure that expansion is not only about increasing numbers, but also about improving equity and directing support where it will have the greatest impact. |
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| | <p>in improving both children’s progress and parental engagement, contributing to a stronger home learning environment across Oldham.</p> <p>Making it Real in Oldham will be delivered in a number of formats, including MIR in Hubs, MIR in schools, MIR in settings and MIR Enhanced</p> | |
| <p>Play, Learn, Grow</p> | <p>Deliver the Play, Learn and Grow – Making it REAL programme, which uses the four strands of early literacy and the ORIM framework to help parents understand how children learn and develop. The programme builds parental confidence and equips families to create positive, engaging home learning environments.</p> <p>In Oldham, the programme will be delivered by trained practitioners through a hybrid model of home visits and small group sessions, with a focus on reaching families in communities that may face barriers to accessing traditional services. This approach offers personalised support while also encouraging peer connection and shared learning.</p> <p>Evidence from previous delivery shows strong outcomes:</p> | <p>We currently reach around 80 children each year through the existing model, and the intention is to replicate and expand this offer so that more families benefit from high-quality early literacy support. As part of the scale-up, we will prioritise targeted outreach to children who are most in need of support, particularly those living in communities we have not yet reached or who face barriers to accessing early years provision. This will ensure that expansion is not only about increasing numbers, but also about improving equity and directing support where it will have the greatest impact.</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 90% of parents report gaining confidence in supporting their child's early learning and development.• 90% of parents say they now understand how to create a positive home learning environment. <p>This work directly supports Oldham's Best Start in Life priorities around early intervention, family empowerment, and reducing inequalities.</p> | |
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Stage 2 – Embedding and Expansion

| Theme | Step/Action | Purpose/Outcome | Lead/Key Partners |
|-------------|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| Family Help | Coordinate and align future planning with key prevention and family help programmes, including Families First and Live Well, to establish a shared, streamlined approach to assessment and planning across the system | Reduce duplication; ensure early, coordinated support at the right time. | LA, NHS, SEND, Safeguarding partners |
| Family Help | Support Family Hubs in meeting mandated checks and identifying pathway of support within the Healthy Child Programme | Identify needs earlier than 2.5 years and link to support quickly. | Public Health, NHS, LA, Hubs |
| Family Help | Develop and test multi-lingual, multi-channel digital offer (QR codes, social media, apps) plus offline alternatives. | Increase awareness of support and tackle digital exclusion. | Comms, Digital, VCSE, Hubs |

| Theme | Step/Action | Purpose/Outcome | Lead/Key Partners |
|---------------------|--|---|------------------------------------|
| Access & Childcare | Agree a borough-wide strategy to close the gap between eligibility and take-up (15/30 hours, EYPP). | Increase use of funded entitlements by priority families. | LA EY, Family Hubs, PVI's, Schools |
| Access & Childcare | <p>Ensure clear, accessible information about the role of Child and Family SEND and Inclusion Practitioners delivery of the LISO role. To ensure appropriate advice, support and guidance is provided to families, PVI settings and other professionals</p> <p>Utilising quarterly data on children requiring early support within the PVI sector, targeting those children (approximately 33%) who have potential to meet GLD with earlier intervention</p> | Make it easier for families of children with SEND to access timely support whilst supporting capacity of LISO's | |
| Quality & Workforce | Map existing training offers (GM modules, WellComm, ELKLAN, GMCA Reflect Tool etc.) plus wider system workforce training, e.g. around DV. | See what's available, what's working, and where the gaps are. | LA EY, Training providers |

| Theme | Step/Action | Purpose/Outcome | Lead/Key Partners |
|---------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| Quality & Workforce | Explore and develop initiatives on toilet training and school readiness (clear messages, tools for parents, training for staff). | Reduce lost teaching time and improve readiness for learning. | Public Health, Schools, PVI's, Hubs |
| Quality & Workforce | Set up regular forums for best practice sharing between schools, PVI's, and childminders. | Spread what works and reduce variation in quality. | LA EY, Schools, PVI's |
| Family Help | Develop a clear suite of signposting and referral pathways enabling LISO to direct families to the appropriate named professional for early intervention, including Quality and Vulnerable Children Practitioners and the Better Communication Team | Provide timely, preventative interventions to reduce the risk of emerging SEND or communication needs that could affect children's Good Level of Development and readiness for school | LA EY, BCT, Family Hubs, LISO's |

Stage 3 – Scale Up and Sustainability

| Theme | Step/Action | Purpose/Outcome | Lead/Key Partners |
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| Access & Childcare | Support development of school-based and community-based nursery places where needed. | Ensure sufficiency and local access in high-need areas. | Schools, LA EY, DfE (where relevant) |
| Quality & Workforce | Co-produce an Early Years Workforce Strategy within districts (all sectors, incl. childminders). | Provide a shared vision for skills, training, and retention. | LA EY, HR, NHS, PVI's, Schools |
| Quality & Workforce | Design a joined-up training offer with clear pathways and priorities (SEND, SLCN, trauma, safeguarding, infant MH). | Build consistent practitioner skills across the system. | LA EY, NHS, GMCA |
| Quality & Workforce | Create a single online location for EY workforce resources and training. | Make it easy for staff to access what they need. | Digital, LA EY, IT |
| Quality & Workforce | Develop schools and settings links/partnerships to develop best practice and cluster approach to successful transitions into reception. Oversee groups focused on cluster moderations to quality | Increase % of children joining Reception ready to learn. | Schools, PVI's, LA EY, Transitions Task and Finish Group |

| Theme | Step/Action | Purpose/Outcome | Lead/Key Partners |
|---------------------|--|---|----------------------------|
| | assure and enable school leaders to submit accurate data | | |
| Quality & Workforce | Develop a plan for workforce retention and recognition (career pathways, supervision, comms). | Address recruitment/retention and value the workforce. | TBC |
| Access & Childcare | Align planning with the strategic vision of the 'Get Oldham working strategy' and 'Lifelong Learning' | Encourage parents back into work/training alongside uptake of universal childcare offer. Support PVI and EY sector to recruit parents, but also into other areas of work/training | LA Employment and Skills |
| Access & Childcare | Realign SEND funding in line with DfE guidance emerging from White Paper 2026 | Align targeted SEND work with national priorities | LA EY, Family Hubs, LISO's |
| Access & Childcare | Work alongside local authority digital strategy in the provision of laptops and other digital resources to digitally excluded families | | |

Programme Timeline

| Stage | Timeframe | Duration | Purpose | Rationale |
|--|----------------------------|-----------|--|--|
| Stage 1 – Foundations & Boroughwide Test-and-Learn | April 2026 – January 2027 | 10 months | Build the core system infrastructure and run early test-and-learn cycles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows rapid mobilisation while still giving enough time to build pathways, data, governance and comms • Two meaningful test-and-learn cycles can run within this window • Ensures early learning is ready to inform Stage 2 from Feb 2027 <p><i>To note: test-and-learn does not stop after this stage, but will be embedded as BAU within stages 2 and 3</i></p> |
| Stage 2 – Embedding & Expansion | February 2027 – March 2029 | 26 months | Embed consistent practice across all districts, expand reach, strengthen early identification and attendance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a long, stable period to embed system change • Aligns with the statutory 2028 GLD target year and allows a full year after to consolidate improvements • Supports workforce development, outreach, EYPP, SEND navigation and attendance work at scale |

| Stage | Timeframe | Duration | Purpose | Rationale |
|---|---------------------------|-----------|--|--|
| Stage 3 – Boroughwide Scale-Up & Sustainability (Cross-Cutting) | October 2027 – March 2029 | 18 months | Ensure long-term sustainability, scale what works, and mature the system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This overlaps with Stage 2, but only begins once Stage 2 is underway • Sustainability is not a time bound activity, it must run mainly in parallel with stage 2 • Allows continuous improvement, scaling of effective practice, and system maturity • Matches DfE’s preferred test-and-learn approach |

Proposed Focus Beyond Statutory GLD Targets:

| Target Area | What We’re Focusing On | Why It Matters | Next Steps / Actions |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Attendance in Early Years Settings | Identifying children with 90% or lower attendance in school-based nurseries; continuing improvement work. Planning to pilot the same approach in PVI settings, using termly sufficiency data. | Low attendance in early years impacts development, readiness for school, and early identification of needs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue targeted support for low-attending children • Build attendance monitoring into PVI sufficiency returns • Use data to offer early help and engagement with families |
| Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) | Setting up a working group with sector representatives to improve | EYPP is under-claimed and under-used, meaning children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish working group |

| Target Area | What We're Focusing On | Why It Matters | Next Steps / Actions |
|--|---|--|--|
| | <p>how EYPP is used. Many parents don't realise they are eligible because EYPP isn't linked to FSM in early years.</p> | <p>miss out on additional support they are entitled to.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop simple guidance for settings and parents • Improve identification and communication of EYPP eligibility through partnership working with DWP • Map data to better understand the most appropriate way of building target around uptake |
| <p>Birth Rate & Non-Attendance Mapping</p> | <p>Using Oldham's annual birth rate of ~3,300 to map children against early years attendance and identify those not in any setting.</p> | <p>Helps target families who may be isolated, vulnerable, or missing early learning opportunities.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-reference birth data with attendance data • Identify children not accessing any provision • Target outreach and engagement through Family Hubs and partners |