
Havering Best Start in Life Strategy - Draft

Introduction & Context

Havering's ambition is to ensure **every child has the best start in life**, with families able to access **integrated support early, high-quality early education**, and **excellent practice** from birth through Reception. This three-year action plan sets out how Havering will deliver the Department for Education's (DfE) **Best Start in Life** (BSiL) strategy locally, drawing on national policy, local priorities, and the lived experiences of children and families. The plan is rooted in a robust understanding of **local needs**, as evidenced by the **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment** (JSNA), and is shaped by the borough's vision for all **children and young people to thrive, achieve, and live safe, healthy lives**.

National Policy Context

The DfE's Best Start in Life strategy is a cornerstone of the government's commitment to **improving outcomes for children in their earliest years**. The strategy highlights the critical importance of the **first 1,001 days** - from conception to age two - in shaping **lifelong health, wellbeing, and educational attainment**. It sets out a vision for integrated, accessible, and high-quality early years services, with a strong focus on:

- **Family Hubs:** Creating welcoming, multi-agency spaces where families can access health, education, Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND), and parenting support.
- **Early Identification and Intervention:** Ensuring that children and families receive timely support, particularly those at risk of disadvantage.
- **Workforce Development:** Building a skilled, confident workforce across early years, health, and social care.
- **Reducing Inequalities:** Targeting support to close gaps in outcomes for disadvantaged children, those with SEND, and children from minority backgrounds.
- **Evidence-Based Practice:** Embedding proven models and continuous improvement in service delivery.

The BSiL strategy aligns with wider national priorities, including the Healthy Child Programme, SEND reforms, and the government's focus on school readiness, early language, and narrowing the attainment gap.

Local Policy Context

Happy, Healthy Lives is a comprehensive strategy designed to support the well-being and development of children and young people in Havering. This plan outlines our **shared vision, priorities, and actions** to ensure that every child and young person in our community has the opportunity to lead a happy, healthy life. This plan aims to deliver on the aspirations set out in our Council's Corporate vision: **The Havering you want to be part of.**

The BSIL Plan sits within Havering's wider Integrated Starting Well Plan which is structured around our **WISH** for children and young people in Havering:

- **Well** – Improving health outcomes, strengthening Healthy Child Programme delivery, tackling obesity and mental health challenges.
- **Inspired** - Raising aspiration, promoting school readiness, extending childcare, strengthening careers advice, and supporting educational recovery.
- **Safe** – Strengthening safeguarding, improving early identification, tackling exploitation, and responding to Ofsted ILACS findings (2024).
- **Heard** – Embedding youth participation through SHOUT, Youth Council, Mind of My Own and co-production.
- **Treated Fairly** – Reducing inequalities, addressing disproportionality, and improving support for SEND and care-experienced children.

The BSIL Plan reflects the shared priorities across education, early help, public health, children's social care and health partners, including:

- The renewed **Early Help Strategy** focusing on 1001 days, SEND, mental health, and adolescent safeguarding.
- The **SEND & AP Strategy 2024–2029** commitments to inclusion, preparing for adulthood, and delivering earlier interventions.
- The **Healthy Weight Strategy 2024–2029** and **Tobacco Harm Reduction Strategy**.
- The Education Place Planning Strategy and improved attendance approaches under **Working Together to Improve School Attendance** (2024).

Local Demographic and Needs Profile

Havering is a borough of contrasts and rapid change. According to the JSNA and recent data profiles:

- **Population Growth and Diversity:** Havering experienced the **highest net increase in children among all London boroughs** from 2016 to 2020. As of mid-2024, ONS estimates there are approximately 63,777 children and young people (0–17), making up 23% of the borough's population. The borough is **increasingly diverse**, with around 1 in 4 pupils speaking a first language other than English.

- **Deprivation and Inequality:** While Havering is ranked 110 out of 153 upper tier local authorities for deprivation (where 1 is most deprived and 153 is least deprived), there are **significant pockets of need**. 29% of Havering children are estimated to be living in **poverty after housing costs**. In 2025, 32.2% of homeless households had dependent children.
- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND):** The number of children with **Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)** has risen sharply, with 3,009 children and young people holding an EHCP as of January 2025. Autistic Spectrum Disorder is the most common primary need.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** At the 2–2.5 year health review, **85.6% of children were at or above the expected level in all five areas of development**, exceeding the national average. However, 22% of children aged 4–5 and 40% of those aged 10–11 are **overweight or obese**, and 27.5% of five-year-olds experience **dental decay**.
- **Safeguarding and Vulnerability:** As of March 2025, there were 510 children with a Child in Need plan, 357 subject to a child protection plan, and 268 children in care. The borough has a **strong early help offer** but faces ongoing challenges in safeguarding and supporting vulnerable families.

Educational Outcomes and Aspirations

Havering's early years and educational outcomes are strong but not without challenge:

- **Good Level of Development (GLD):** In 2024/25, 68.5% of children achieved a GLD at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, slightly above the national average. However, to meet the DfE's target of 75.8% by 2028, an additional 242 children each year must achieve GLD.
- **Disadvantaged Children:** 55.7% of children eligible for free school meals achieved GLD in 2024/25, above the national FSM average, but the gap remains a key focus for targeted intervention.
- **School Quality:** 94% of schools in Havering are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted (2024), and the borough's attainment at Key Stages 2 and 4 remains above national averages.

Insights from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

The JSNA provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors shaping children's outcomes in Havering:

- **Life Course Approach:** The JSNA covers maternal and newborn health, early years, school age, SEND, and transitions to adulthood, highlighting the importance of early intervention and integrated support.
- **Social Determinants:** Housing, poverty, parental employment, and access to services are identified as key drivers of health and educational inequalities.

- **Community Assets:** Having benefits from a network of family hubs, children’s centres, libraries, and strong partnerships across health, education, and the voluntary sector.
- **Voice of Children and Families:** The JSNA and local engagement activities (e.g., SHOUT survey, Youth Wellbeing Census) emphasize the importance of listening to children and families, co-producing solutions, and addressing issues such as mental health, safety, and inclusion.

Strategic Vision and Partnership

This action plan is underpinned by Havering’s strategic vision: **“All children and young people thrive and achieve through accessing high-quality education provision, and are supported to live safe and healthy lives.”**

The BSiL plan is shaped by three core priorities:

1. **Better Support for Families:** Embedding family hubs, targeted outreach, and integrated SEND support.
2. **More Accessible Early Education and Childcare:** Expanding high-quality, flexible childcare and targeting support for disadvantaged families.
3. **Improving Quality in Early Years Including Reception:** Strengthening quality assurance, workforce development, and evidence-based interventions.

The BSiL plan is a product of partnership - across the Council, NHS, schools, early years providers, and the community - and is informed by national policy, local data, and the voices of those it seeks to serve.