

# KNOWSLEY BEST START LOCAL PLAN

**2026/27**





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# FOREWORD

## from the Executive Director (Children and Young People)

Every child in Knowsley deserves the very best start in life. The earliest years are critical in shaping a child's health, development, relationships and future opportunities, and we know that when families are supported early, consistently and compassionately, children are far more likely to thrive.

This Best Start Local Plan sets out how Knowsley and its partners will work together to deliver an integrated, accessible and effective system of support for families from pregnancy to age five. It brings together health, early years, education, early help and community services around a shared ambition: to give every Knowsley child strong foundations for learning, wellbeing and lifelong success.

Knowsley continues to face significant challenges. Many of our communities experience some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country, and we know this has a direct impact on children's early development, parental wellbeing and long-term outcomes for families. As a local authority, we have been clear-eyed about where improvement is needed and have committed to doing things differently. This plan sits firmly within our wider programme of transformation across our Department for Children and Young People and reflects our determination to strengthen prevention, intervene earlier and provide more coherent support to families.

At the heart of this plan is our evolving Best Start Family Hub model. Family Hubs will act as welcoming, locality-based access points, bringing together universal and targeted services in a way that makes sense to families. By strengthening pathways across midwifery, health visiting, early years provision, perinatal mental health and early help, we are creating a system that is better joined-up, easier to navigate and more responsive to need.

We are proud of the progress already made through the Family Hub Programme, but we recognise that this is only the foundation. This plan looks ahead, aligning local delivery with national Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies guidance and the ambition for more children to achieve a Good Level of Development by the time they start school, with a strong focus on narrowing inequalities.

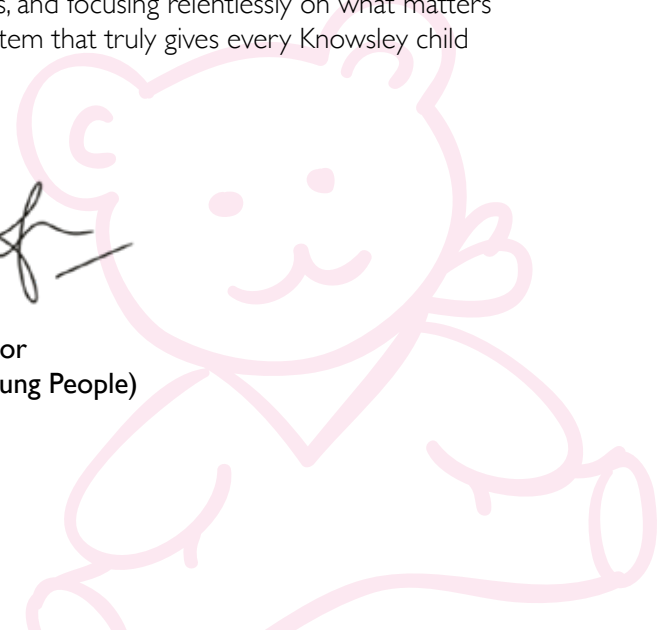
Crucially, this is a partnership plan. It reflects the collective commitment of colleagues across the ICB, NHS, education, the voluntary and community sector, and the Council. It has also been shaped by the voices and experiences of parents and carers, whose insight is essential to designing services that families trust and want to use.

This Best Start Local Plan marks an important step in Knowsley's journey. It provides a clear and realistic roadmap for the next phase of improvement, while laying the groundwork for a longer-term Best Start in Life Strategy. By continuing to work together, listening to families, and focusing relentlessly on what matters most for children, we can build a system that truly gives every Knowsley child the best possible start in life.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Mirfin'.

**Mark Mirfin**  
Executive Director  
(Children and Young People)



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Best Start Local Plan (BSLP) sets out Knowsley's approach to delivering an integrated, locality-based Best Start Family Hub model that ensures every child has the foundations they need to thrive. The plan describes how Family Hubs will act as the central access point for both universal and targeted early years services, with a strong emphasis on early identification, prevention, and whole-family support. Through strengthened pathways across health, education, early help and specialist services, the BSLP sets out a clear roadmap for improving the early childhood experience – specifically focusing on speech and language development, infant wellbeing, parental mental health, responsive caregiving and improved home learning environments. This approach demonstrates clear alignment to the recently published 'Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies' guidance published in December 2025.

The Plan brings together a shared partnership commitment to delivering seamless, accessible and coordinated support from pregnancy to age five through the partnership Start for Life and Beyond Offer. This includes expanding the reach and function of locality hubs, embedding multi-agency practice, improving transitions between support pathways and strengthening the digital "front door" so families can find help quickly and easily.

Knowsley continues to experience some of the highest levels of deprivation in England, with multiple neighbourhoods among the 1-10% most deprived nationally. These inequalities are strongly associated with poorer child development outcomes, higher levels of infant and maternal vulnerability, and increased need for early help and specialist support. Local needs assessments show persistent challenges in early language acquisition, social and emotional development, parental mental health, infant feeding, early oral health and engagement with preventative services.

In response, the BSLP prioritises a set of core early years outcomes central to closing the gap between Knowsley and national benchmarks:



- Improved early speech, language and communication, especially across the most deprived neighbourhoods
- Increased Good Level of Development (GLD), in line with the national mission of 75% by 2028
- Improved school readiness, ensuring more children meet developmental milestones and successfully transition into early education
- Improved parental wellbeing, with better access to perinatal mental health, parent-infant relationship support and peer networks
- Reduced child health inequalities, through enhanced access to health visiting, midwifery, infant feeding, early health interventions and consistent developmental checks

These priorities reflect not only Knowsley's needs profile but also the wider children's services context, including the Family First Partnership Programme, the Council's accelerated improvement activity following the recent Ofsted judgement, and the shared ambition to deliver a coordinated, whole-system early help model. Future iterations of the plan will also seek to ensure alignment with the emerging neighbourhood health framework.

Knowsley's Best Start Family Hub model is already strongly aligned to national policy frameworks, including Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies, the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme, and the Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life strategy. Through participation in the 2022-25 national Family Hub Programme, the borough has successfully embedded a model across all required funded workstreams parenting support, perinatal mental health, early language and home learning, infant feeding and parent/carer panels – as well as significant transformation activity around data, workforce, governance and community asset development.

Key achievements to date include the launch of three Family Hubs, expanded parenting and early years timetables, enhanced perinatal and infant feeding pathways, a published Start for Life offer, improved breastfeeding rates, and

strengthened multi-agency collaboration across health, education and the voluntary sector. This progress places Knowsley in a strong position to adopt the national Best Start Family Hubs model from April 2026, and to continue aligning delivery with the national mission to achieve a 75% GLD rate by 2028.

The Best Start Local Plan therefore provides a coherent and forward-looking framework that demonstrates compliance with national requirements, responsiveness to local need, and a strong trajectory of improvement across the early years system. This will be further strengthened by the creation of a partnership Best Start in Life Strategy that is currently being developed and is expected to be complete in autumn 2026.



# STRATEGIC CONTEXT



## National Context

### **National Strategy: Giving every child the Best Start in Life**

The Government's strategy for improving child development and meeting the ambition that 75% of 5-year-olds in England Have a good level of development by 2028.

National Priority areas:

Family Support	Early Education and Childcare	Quality in Early Years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integration – a new Best Start Family Service that brings together parenting, healthcare and education support services</li> <li>Neighbourhood Health Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universal childcare offer</li> <li>Support for low-income families</li> <li>Support for working parents</li> <li>Inclusion for children with SEND</li> <li>Availability of places</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruitment and retention</li> <li>Extra help to achieve and thrive</li> <li>Improvement support</li> <li>Support and grow a skilled early years workforce</li> <li>High-quality inclusive practice</li> <li>Stronger partnerships</li> </ul>

National policy direction for early years and family support has been shaped by a clear governmental commitment to improving child development, reducing inequalities, and embedding more joined-up systems of family help. The Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies guidance (published December 2025) establishes the overarching framework for local authorities, setting out expectations for integrated early childhood services, prioritising disadvantaged families, defining core service requirements, and specifying the role of local planning in delivering coherent support pathways. This guidance emphasises the need for comprehensive Best Start Local Plans that align with local needs assessments, Family Hub core service expectations, and emerging neighbourhood health integration approaches.

A central national driver is the wider Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme, first introduced in 2021-2022 and then expanded and strengthened across subsequent administrations. The programme's aim is to join up and enhance services delivered through transformed family hubs so that all parents and carers can access the support they need, when they need it, with particular emphasis on the Start for Life period (0-2 years). The updated programme guidance of December 2025 reaffirms this focus. These national expectations sit alongside the Plan for Change (2024) missions, which commit to breaking the link between socio-economic background and outcomes to achieve the healthiest generation of children.

The government's strategic shift is reinforced by the Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy (July 2025), which mandates Family Hub rollout to every local authority by April 2026 and explicitly requires councils to produce a Best Start Plan aligned to national school-readiness targets (notably achieving 75% Good Level of Development by 2028). This represents a significant evolution from the earlier, optional local planning expectations under the 2022 guidance, positioning the Best Start Local Plan as a core accountability and delivery mechanism for local authorities.

# Knowsley's local Context

## Local Policy Landscape

The Local Plan requires alignment with local strategies and frameworks.

National Priority areas:



Knowsley faces some of the highest levels of deprivation in England, with multiple neighbourhoods ranking among the most deprived nationally (see Figure 1 below). The 2025 English Indices of Deprivation confirm that deprivation remains deeply embedded across several Lower-Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the borough, reinforcing long-standing socio-economic challenges. Comparing IMD 2019 to IMD 2025 suggests that intra-Borough-inequalities are growing with LSOA's in the 9th decile neighbouring those in the 1st decile. However, deprivation also remains persistent in those areas where it has been historically high, most notable in areas of Kirkby and North Huyton.

The majority of deprived areas are concentrated in the centre and North of the borough, specifically Kirkby and North Huyton, with pockets in Prescot, Halewood South and St Michaels wards. Many of the least deprived areas lie along the border and form part of a larger cluster of low-deprivation neighbourhoods that cross the Knowsley boundary. Kirkby has persistently higher proportion of children in low-income families, particularly in Northwood which has the highest percentage of children living in relative low-income households (38.4%, 2024). In Huyton, particularly Page Moss, child poverty has increased over the last 10 years, including in-work families in poverty that has more than doubled in this period.

In Halewood, there are significant intra-inequalities across North and South i.e. children in low-income households in the South (38%) compared to the North (28%), receiving Employment Support Allowance (6%) and (4%) and lone-parent households (17.35%) and (12.3%) respectively.

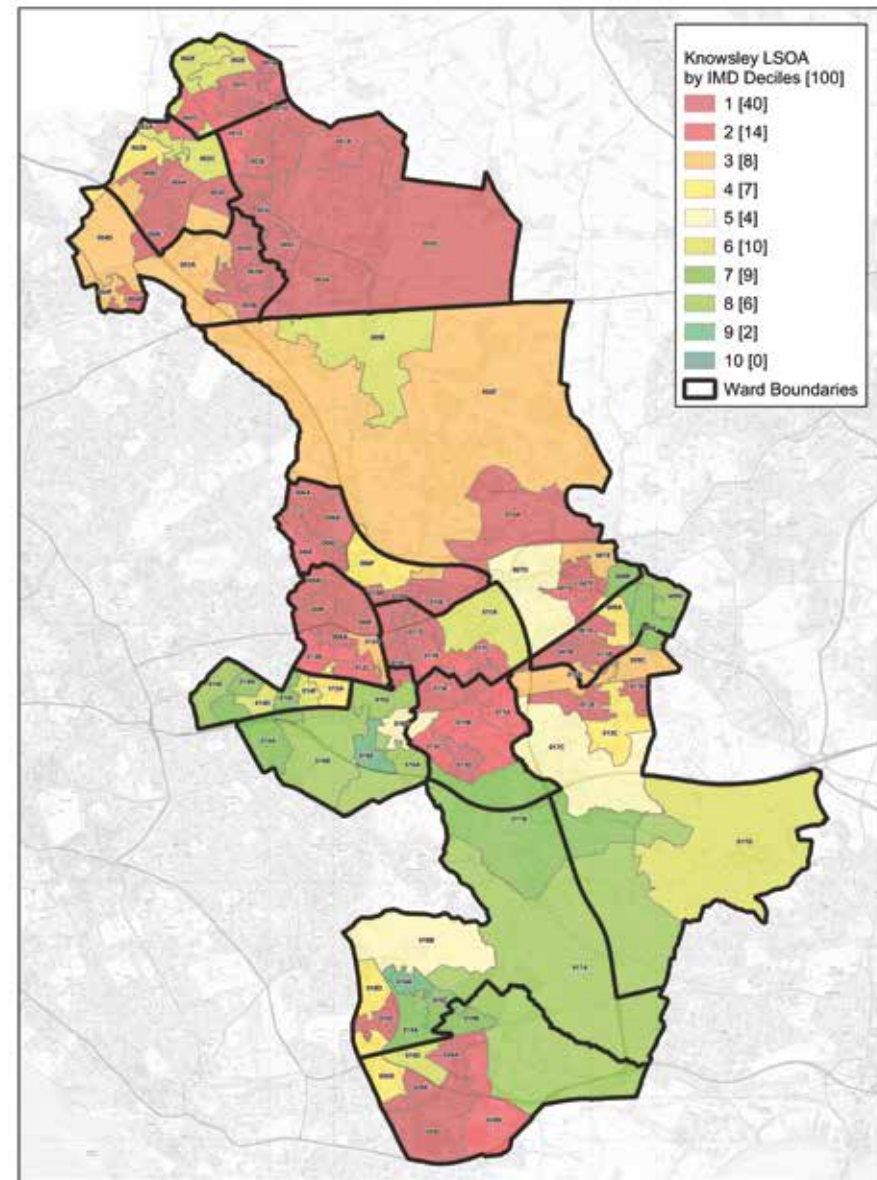
These deprivation patterns intersect closely with Knowsley's wider children's services context. In January 2025, Ofsted rated Knowsley's children's social care services as "Inadequate". Following this judgement, the Council has implemented an improvement plan, strengthening management oversight, increasing training, recruiting additional staff, and securing external improvement support. The Council is now making meaningful progress, with monitoring visits noting strengthened leadership, improved governance and growing evidence of better practice. This period of accelerated improvement provides the critical backdrop for a renewed partnership Best Start in Life Strategy currently being developed, ensuring early years and family support reforms are aligned with social care transformation.

Knowsley's Family Hub Programme, launched in 2022 as part of the national Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme, provides a further anchor for the Best Start Local Plan. As one of the 75 local authority areas receiving programme funding for 2022-2025, Knowsley has established a network of developing Family Hubs, including the Northwood Family Hub at The Pride Centre, opened in September 2023, New Hutte Children and Family Hub in June 2025 and finally Jubilee Family Hub in July 2025. Hubs, supplemented by Children's Centres and outreach locations, now offer a growing locality-based model combining midwifery, health visiting, infant feeding, perinatal mental health support, parenting programmes and wider family help services.

Supported by the national model framework for Family Hubs, Knowsley continues to enhance integrated delivery, digital maturity, co-location and a multi-agency "single front door" approach. This locality development provides essential infrastructure for delivering the Best Start vision at place level.

**Figure 1 Overview of Deprivation in Knowsley**

IMD Deciles Knowsley 2025 with LSOA Names

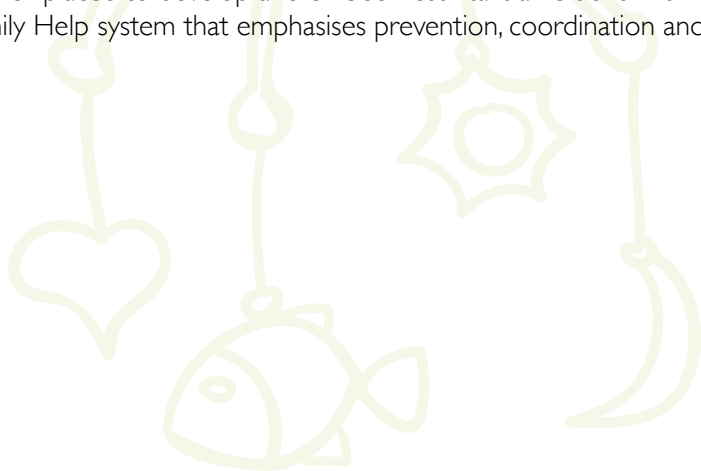


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Looking forward, Knowsley's partnership is currently developing a comprehensive Best Start in Life Strategy, aligned with the Knowsley Council Plan, wider children's services transformation, the Children and Families Plan, Family Hubs delivery, education improvement ambitions, and the local commitment to improving Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes. The strategy is scheduled for completion by September 2026, providing a clear strategic line of sight between the Best Start Local Plan, Family Hub development and statutory improvement requirements. This alignment will support a whole-system, whole-family response to Knowsley's persistently high levels of need, ensuring early years transformation is fully integrated within the borough's long-term improvement and prevention agenda.

Knowsley has an already existing strong Early Help offer. This aims to support families at the earliest point with partners identifying need and providing this via a Team around the Family approach supported by an Early Help Assessment and Plan. As part of a graduated response to need, the Council's Family First service supports families with more complex needs, aiming to reduce the likelihood of escalation to statutory services.

Family First provides targeted Early Help support through multi-agency interventions that support the delivery of a Family Plan created through a whole-family Early Help Assessment. The service supports and is complimented by a partnership response to Early Help at the earlier point of intervention. Knowsley's Best Start in Life and Beyond offer aligns and compliments the existing Early Help approach. As the new Family Help approach is developed further through the national Families First Partnership Programme, the local partnership is well placed to develop and embed Best Start ambitions within a maturing Family Help system that emphasises prevention, coordination and early response.



# VISION, PRINCIPLES AND OUTCOMES



Knowsley's emerging Vision for Best Start Family Hubs is:

“Every Knowsley child has the best possible start in life, supported by integrated, accessible Family Hubs and strong early years pathways.”

Alongside Knowsley's vision, a number of key principles have been established via the embedding of the Family Hub Programme in Knowsley over recent years. A description of each principle is detailed below:

## (i) **Locality-Based, Accessible Delivery**

Knowsley delivers Family Hub services through a growing locality model, ensuring that support is available where families live and can be accessed without barriers. This approach reflects national expectations that Family Hubs provide a single access point, outreach, and a family-friendly culture that prioritises disadvantaged communities. The establishment of locality hubs such as Northwood Family Hub at The Pride Centre, Jubilee Family Hub in Page Moss and New Hutte Family Hub in Halewood demonstrates Knowsley's commitment to providing visible, welcoming, neighbourhood-based provision that families can walk to, reducing digital, transport, and financial barriers to engagement. These hubs are complimented by the offer from the remaining Children's Centres and specific outreach delivery. This mirrors best practice across the National programme, which emphasises co-located, community-anchored early years services as essential for improving reach and take-up among families with the greatest needs. The locality-based delivery is also linked to the wider Council and NHS Neighbourhood agendas.

## (ii) **Integration with Health (Midwifery, Health Visiting, Perinatal Mental Health)**

Knowsley's Family Hub delivery model is built on close and increasing integration with health partners, particularly midwifery, health visiting, infant feeding support and perinatal mental health services, all of which are routinely delivered through the local hub network. This aligns with national best practice, which requires Family Hubs to act as multi-agency, co-located spaces delivering Start for Life services and strengthening joint working with local health systems and neighbourhood health plans. Such integration supports earlier identification of need, consistent messaging across professionals, and improved continuity for families across the first 1,001 days, reflecting the evidence-based priorities set out in national Best Start in Life and Healthy Babies guidance.

## (iii) **Prevention and Early Help at the Lowest Effective Threshold**

The Early Help model in Knowsley enables preventative support through Early Help Assessments, coordinated multi-agency planning and timely interventions, embedding prevention as the first response before needs escalate. This mirrors national guidance stating that early help should be provided as soon as need emerges, using a coordinated, whole-family approach to avoid unnecessary escalation into statutory services. The Family Hub model reinforces this by offering universal and targeted services in one place, ensuring families receive help at the lowest effective threshold, in line with national delivery expectations for funded Start for Life services. Knowsley's approach also supports wider social care improvement, addressing Ofsted's concerns about timeliness and early identification through strengthened preventative pathways and is linked into the Families First Partnership Programme which is developing the future Family Help model.

#### (iv) Whole-Family, Relational Approach to Delivery

Knowsley's Family Hub offer is grounded in a whole-family, relational practice model that places relationships, trust and continuity at the heart of support. This reflects national Family Hub framework criteria, which require local areas to adopt strengths-based practice, co-production, and a holistic understanding of family needs. Family First contributes to this relational approach through coordinated multi-agency support plans, focusing on building resilience across the household rather than addressing issues in isolation. This aligns strongly with national principles emphasising that sustained improvements in child outcomes are best achieved when services listen to families, work collaboratively and reduce the number of professional families must repeat their story to.

#### (v) Focus on Vulnerable Groups

Knowsley's model prioritises vulnerable families, including those experiencing complex lives, poverty, safeguarding risk, SEND needs, and perinatal mental health concerns. Local intelligence brought together in a need assessment – such as the high prevalence of deprivation (and specifically health-related deprivation) in neighbourhoods like Northwood, Page Moss and Stockbridge Village shows the necessity of targeted, intensive outreach and support. National guidance on Family Hubs emphasises the critical role hubs play in reducing inequalities, reaching underserved families and ensuring equitable access to Start for Life and wider family help services. Furthermore, Ofsted's findings highlight the need for vigilant support for children at risk, and the Family Hub and Early Help systems directly contribute to addressing these vulnerabilities through improved assessment, coordination and early response.

## Knowsley's Family Hub Programme – overview of key outcomes:

The following table provides an overview of desired outcomes associated with Knowsley's current Start for Life and Beyond offer and the emerging Best Start in Life Partnership Strategy:

Outcome	Family Hub Contribution	Key Indicator(s)	National Alignment
Increased GLD (72.1% by 2028)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parenting and early literacy programmes</li> <li>Universal and targeted health and mental well-being interventions within Best Start Family Hub settings</li> <li>Locality outreach in high need areas to increase take-up of support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall % achieving a GLD by age 5</li> <li>GLD gap between FSM / Non-FSM children</li> <li>% of children 0-2 years reached in the lower 10% Super Output Area's (SOA) within the borough</li> </ul>	Directly aligns to national GLD mission and Best Start requirement for local GLD targets

Outcome	Family Hub Contribution	Key Indicator(s)	National Alignment
Improved early speech, language and communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wellcomm screening &amp; assessment</li> <li>Early language interventions &amp; support</li> <li>Integrated speech and language referral pathways</li> <li>Outreach in most deprived areas to identify need and promote access to support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% of children achieving expected level in Communication &amp; Language at EYFS</li> <li>% of under 5's improving scores for WellComm accessing Best Start Family Hub interventions</li> </ul>	<p>Supports Start for Life focus on early language and home learning environment</p> <p>Aligns with the government's mission to improve child development and address inequalities</p>
Improved school readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi agency early help assessments</li> <li>Parenting programmes</li> <li>Co-produced transition support</li> <li>Targeted school readiness support for vulnerable households</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% children meeting developmental milestones at 2-2½ years</li> <li>increase uptake of free entitlement 2 year old provision by the most disadvantaged children</li> </ul>	<p>Reflects Best Start Family Hub principle of joined-up early education, health and family support as core to school readiness</p>
Improved parental wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-located perinatal mental-health, midwifery and health visiting support</li> <li>Relational parenting / evidence based early intervention programmes (Nurture, PAFT etc)</li> <li>Practical support (infant feeding, smoking cessation, welfare advice etc)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># parents accessing universal parenting support via family hubs</li> <li># parents accessing perinatal mental health support via family hubs</li> <li>Improvement in parental self-reported wellbeing e.g. WEMWBS</li> <li>Engagement in peer support networks and parenting groups</li> </ul>	<p>Aligns with Start for Life focus on perinatal mental health, parent-infant relationships and whole-family outcomes</p>
Reduced child health inequalities through improved access to Best Start Family Hub services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrated health offer at locality family hubs</li> <li>Outreach services targeted to high-deprivation neighbourhoods</li> <li>Consistent early identification through shared digital and data pathways</li> <li>Stronger pathways into targeted public health interventions (nutrition, smoking cessation, oral health)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access rates to Best Start to Life services</li> <li>Breastfeeding rates</li> <li>Immunisation rates</li> <li>Healthy weight</li> <li>Reduce parental smoking</li> <li>Increase in successful Health Visitor contacts</li> </ul>	<p>Matches Best Start requirement that Family Hubs reduce inequalities and improve access to early health interventions, contributing to national public health goals</p>

# BEST START FAMILY HUB DELIVERY MODEL

In Knowsley there are currently three Family Hubs and a further four Family Hub out-reach sites, three currently branded as children’s centres and one a community venue used extensively for delivery (see Figure 2 below).

Government guidance requires that at least 70% of Family Hubs are located within the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally. Analysis of the latest deprivation data (2025) confirms that six of the seven Family Hubs and Family Hub out-reach sites meet this criterion.

Of the three Family Hubs, all are within the 30% most deprived LSOAs nationally, with Northwood and New Hutte situated within the 10% most deprived LSOAs. Of the Family Hub outreach sites and children centres, all but the centre in Whiston are in the 30% most deprived, with Stockbridge Village Centre and the Star centres within the 10% most deprived. This demonstrates that our Family Hubs and wider delivery network is strategically positioned to target areas of greatest need, ensuring resources and support are focused where they will have the most impact. This is particularly important in Knowsley where levels of child poverty and deprivation remain significantly above the national average in certain localities.

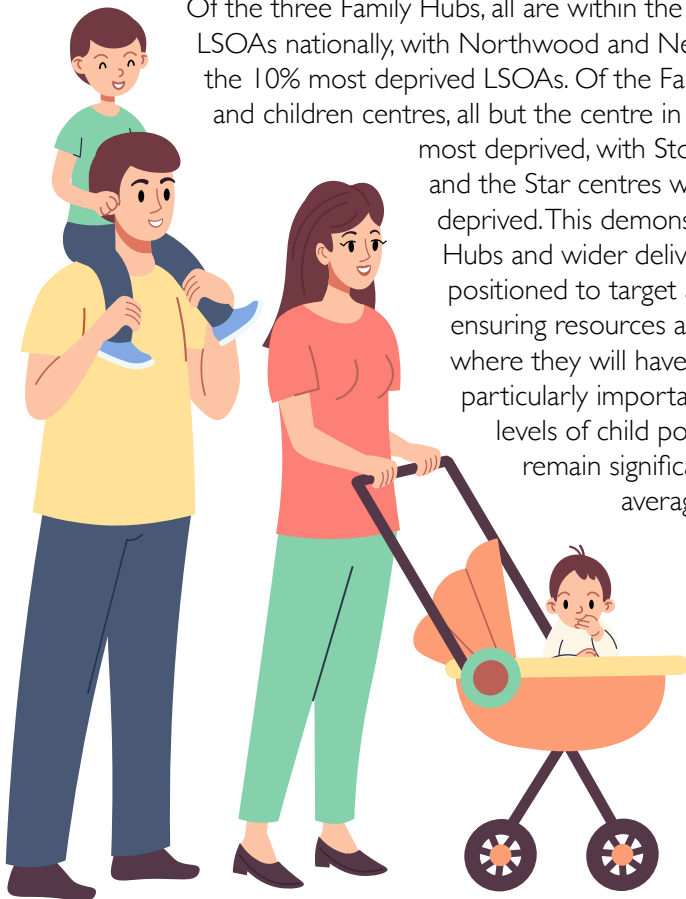
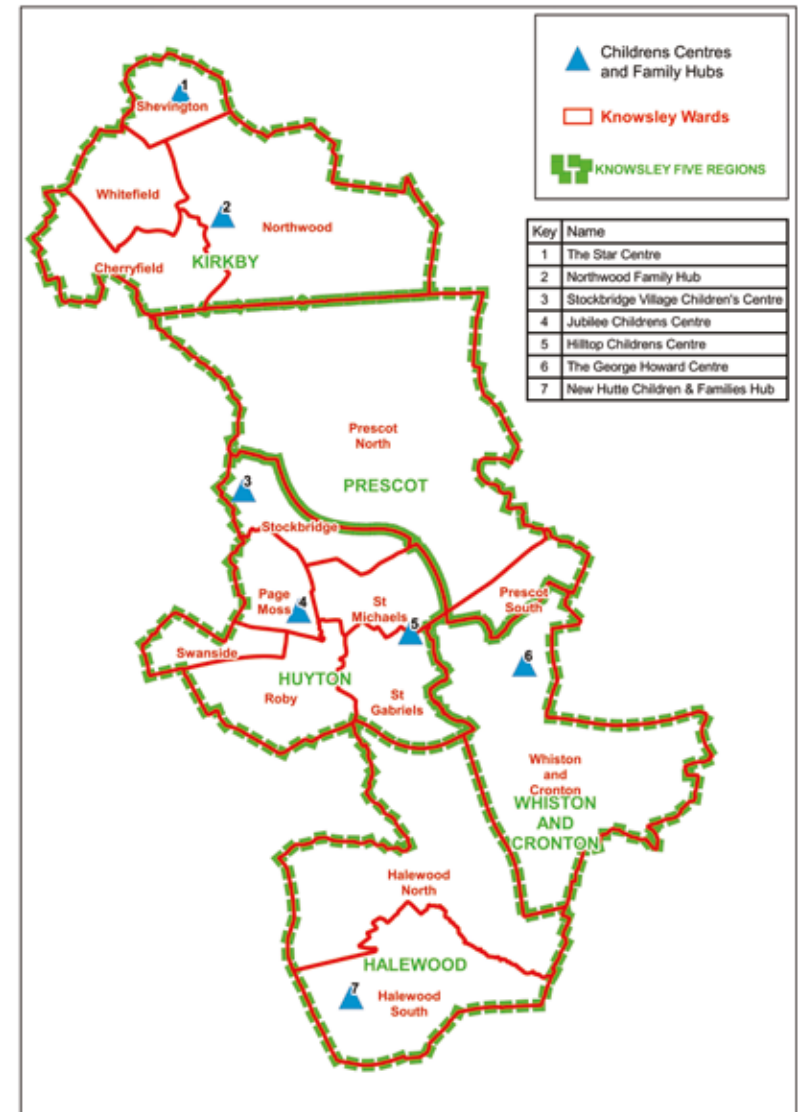


Figure 2 Family Hubs and Children’s Centres in Knowsley



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## Core Services Delivery Plan

### **Overview of progress in implementation of the National Family Hub Model in Knowsley (2022-2026):**

In April 2022, the Government announced the national Family Hub Programme, selecting Knowsley as one of 75 local authorities to receive three-year funding to develop Family Hubs and deliver the Start for Life offer. Detailed programme guidance was published in August 2022, and Knowsley began developing local delivery plans in October 2022, with a full three-year plan signed off in February 2023. Following a General Election in July 2024 and government policy changes, the programme received a one-year extension, with a new Best Start Family Hubs model planned nationally from April 2026.

National requirements focus on strengthening the Best Start in Life offer across five funded workstreams:

- Parenting Support
- Parent-Infant Relationships & Perinatal Mental Health
- Early Language & Home Learning Environment
- Infant Feeding
- Parent & Carer Panels and Publishing the Offer
- Transformation (governance, data, community assets, workforce)

These expectations required the development of strong multi-agency engagement, integrated early help pathways, consistent parenting and early development support, and improved access to health and early years services through locality-based Family Hubs. All five strands have been well embedded within Knowsley's local delivery model over the past four years of delivery of the previous Family Hubs Programme.

Three Family Hubs have opened across the borough:

- The Pride, Northwood, Kirkby (Sept 2023)
- New Hutte, Halewood (June 2025)
- Jubilee, Huyton (July 2025)

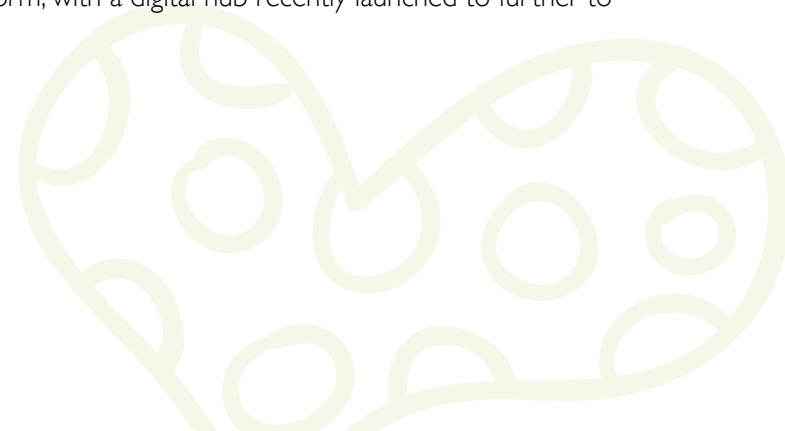
These hubs now host expanded partnership timetables and increasing partner presence within hub sites.

As part of the development of the model, new parenting and Home Learning Environment (HLE) interventions have been developed including Nurture, Welcome to the World, and Parents as First Teachers. Via the agreed WELCOMM approach, the model has also refined and integrated assessment and referral pathways associated with Speech & Language therapy teams.

The model has also developed Stronger perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationship pathways, including multi-agency workforce development and expanded pre-birth support.

Following publication of a borough-wide Breastfeeding Strategy and implementation of an engagement campaign and breastfeeding pledge across local organisations the Borough has seen a significant improvement in breastfeeding rates. The introduction of Knowsley Baby Showers has increased early engagement and provided a cross-demographic entry route into support.

Publication of the 'Start for Life and Beyond offer' has been progressed both in digital and physical form, with a digital hub recently launched to further to expand accessibility.



## Current priorities for Start for life and Beyond (2025-2027) (Best Start Family Hubs Delivery Plan)

The following section provides an overview of the key strategic improvement actions that will be carried forward as part of the current Family Hub delivery model which are aligned with the Borough's offer for 'Start for Life and Beyond':

### 1. Strengthening Local Pathways

Deepening integration between midwifery, health visiting, early years providers and Early Help through further embedding of shared pathways for perinatal mental health, early language, infant feeding and evidence based HLE and Parenting programmes and developing clearer routes for families into wider Early Help and SEND pathways.

### 2. Development of core strategy

Development of a refreshed Best Start Family Hub delivery plan for 2026/27 and a comprehensive Best Start for Life Strategy (aligned to the national priority for 75% of children to achieve GLD by 2028) for approval by September 2026.

### 3. Outreach and Community / Peer-Led Provision

Strengthening community-led groups and peer support networks including embedding outreach as a proactive and routine part of Hub delivery, development of peer parent-to-parent support and a universal prevention focussed offer for perinatal mental health.

### 4. Cross-Cutting Partnership Engagement Activity

A new phase of insight and engagement work to understand barriers to access, and expansion of outreach across early years and wider Family Help services to improve reach and access for those families hardest to reach.

### 5. Expanding the Wider Hub Service Offer

The Family Hub model will increasingly look to include services beyond Start for Life, covering 0-19 (or 25 for SEND), with plans for additional services such as housing, debt advice, youth work and more being linked into Hub pathways over the life of the new 3-year Best Start Family Hub Programme.

### 6. Digital Developments

Following the initial launch of the enhanced digital Hub in March 2026, the platform will see further enhancements over 2026-27 including development of a dedicated booking system, chat function and further development of automated care pathways and AI functionality.

### 7. Family Experience & Voice

Improving how family feedback and children's voice is captured and used to refine hub provision and inform system-wide design, maximising opportunities from digital hub development. Additional staffing capacity has been established to drive forward this element of work at pace.

### 8. Data and Intelligence

Developing improved data governance, shared data systems and analytical dashboards that improve ability to evidence reach, service quality and outcomes.

### 9. Community Asset Development

Strengthening third-sector partnerships, widening social networks, and embedding community-led delivery within Hubs and the evolving network of community assets.

### 10. Workforce Development

Developing a shared partnership workforce plan ensuring sufficient capacity to deliver and developing capability via foundational training for all practitioners working in and around the hubs.

# WORKFORCE AND PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Programme guidance emphasises the need for an integrated, multidisciplinary workforce with consistent standards, shared training, and strong alignment between health, early years, and family help professionals. Knowsley's Best Start workforce model reflects these requirements and sets out a partnership wide approach to developing a skilled, confident and collaborative workforce that delivers high quality support across the 0-5 early years system.

## A Multi-agency, Integrated Workforce

Knowsley's Best Start Family Hubs will continue to host co located delivery from midwifery, health visiting, early years, public health, perinatal mental health, SEND support and Early Help teams, ensuring families receive consistent support through joined up pathways. This supports the national expectation that hubs function as key integration points for health, education and community services. Consideration will also be given to co-location of statutory services in line with Family First Partnership programme guidance and expectations.

## Shared Workforce Development Programme

Knowsley's Family Hub Programme team will continue to work with key partners to deliver a cross-sector training and development framework that includes:

- Foundational training for all staff working in and around Family Hubs (safeguarding, relational practice, trauma informed approaches, perinatal mental health awareness, infant development, speech and language development)

- Joint practice development between health visiting, midwifery and early years practitioners, reflecting the national requirement for strong Start for Life collaborative working
- Strengthening competency in parent infant relationships, early language, infant feeding, and early identification of need, in line with national service expectations
- Embedding a shared practice culture across local authority, health and voluntary/community partners, ensuring consistent messaging, aligned pathways and reduced duplication of professional roles

## Supporting Workforce Capacity and Recruitment

National guidance highlights the importance of stable staffing, specialist capacity and ensuring hubs are adequately resourced. Knowsley's current Best Start Family Hub delivery model is founded on the following key actions:

- Ensuring adequate staffing levels across all hub sites
- Continuing investment in specialist roles, including infant feeding specialists, perinatal mental health practitioners, and early language leads
- Working with health partners to improve recruitment and retention of health visitors, midwives and other key health and early years staff
- Expanding the role of peer supporters and volunteers, consistent with national expectations to build stronger community assets and parent led support networks



# ENGAGEMENT, CO-PRODUCTION AND VOICE

Meaningful engagement with families is a core requirement of the Best Start Family Hubs Programme which emphasises local areas' duty to embed parent and carer voice into the design, delivery and continuous improvement of services. Knowsley's approach aligns closely with these expectations and builds upon the learning established through the Start for Life Parent and Carer Panel model, as set out in national guidance. The last year has seen the recruitment of three Parental Community Outreach Officers (PCOs) to provide specific capacity to this area of work. PCO's are active across the borough, leading consultations and working with practitioners and families to establish ways to improve reach and engagement. In future, the approach will align with the work being progressed to develop a single engagement strategy for Children's Services to ensure that the voice of children and their families is strengthened in the Council's overall approach to service design.

## A System Embedding Parent and Carer Voice

Knowsley will ensure that parents and carers are active partners in shaping the Best Start Family Hub model. It is important families influence decision-making, service standards and local planning. To facilitate this, a hybrid approach has been established to provide formal and informal opportunities to shape delivery. A parent champion model is being developed that will strengthen the Parent Carer Panel approach and ensure the voice of families is representative of the borough's diverse communities.

Opportunities for local parents to participate exist in:

- Service codesigns and testing of new pathways
- Reviewing the accessibility and clarity of the Best Start offer
- Advising on improvements to the digital front door and hub environments
- Identifying barriers to engagement, especially among vulnerable or seldom heard groups

Findings will be fed directly into the refreshed Best Start governance structure to ensure accountability, transparency and visible impact on service development.

## Co-production as a Core Delivery Method

Knowsley will continue to adopt a **co production approach** grounded in relational practice, ensuring families contribute to:

- Design and refinement of early years pathways (e.g., perinatal mental health, infant feeding, early language)
- Locality based service timetabling and group activity planning
- Environmental design within hub spaces, including sensory friendly and culturally appropriate adaptations
- Communications, including co produced messaging, branding and hub identity

This approach supports national expectations that Family Hubs feel welcoming, inclusive and genuinely shaped by the experiences of the families who use them.



## Engagement of Underrepresented and High Need Groups

The Best Start Family Hub model requires particular emphasis on reaching families experiencing disadvantage or those who may be least likely to access services. To align with this expectation, Knowsley will continue to implement targeted engagement strategies including:

- Proactive engagement in high deprivation neighbourhoods, consistent with national guidance prioritising disadvantaged families' access to hub services
- Focused outreach to young parents, families with children with SEND, fathers, and families from minoritised communities
- Use of community venues, peer networks and voluntary sector partners to widen reach
- Behavioural insight led engagement activity to understand barriers and tailor hub delivery accordingly

This approach ensures that those who stand to benefit most from early help are central to shaping service improvements.

## Feedback Loops, Communication and Transparency

Knowsley's model emphasises the importance of demonstrating how family voice directly informs service decisions and will maintain clear and consistent feedback loops, ensuring families can see how their input is used. This will include:

- Publishing "You Said, We Did" type communication summaries on the digital hub and in physical hub spaces
- Regular communication through social media, newsletters and community groups
- Provision of a feedback link in all sections of the new Knowsley Information Hub to ensure the digital offer continues to be shaped by families feedback
- Integrating family voice metrics into hub performance and quality assurance frameworks



# GOVERNANCE, FINANCE AND RESOURCES

The financial framework for Knowsley's Best Start Local Plan aligns with the expectations set out in 'Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies – Preparing for Implementation April 2026', which requires clear mapping of funding streams to local priorities, transparent resource allocation, and robust monitoring arrangements.

Knowsley implements a coherent finance model that brings together DfE/DHSC delivery grants, capital investment, and local authority resources to ensure the sustainability of the Best Start Family Hub network. This includes:

- Mapping all Best Start Family Hub (BSFH) funding – delivery grant, capital investment and services funding – against the core service areas (parenting support, early language, infant feeding, perinatal mental health and parent/carer voice) as required as part of the national Best Start Family Hub grant agreement
- Allocating resources to maintain and expand locality based hub infrastructure, ensuring all Family Hub sites meet minimum standards for colocation, branding, accessibility and digital connectivity, as outlined in the national implementation guidance
- Ensuring adequate funding for transformation enablers – data, intelligence, community assets, workforce development and governance – as required under the Start for Life funded transformation strand
- Implementing robust financial oversight, including quarterly grant monitoring, compliance with DfE assurance requirements, and clear reporting through both local governance and the national quarterly Management Information framework returns to the Department for Education
- Supporting sustainability planning by aligning Best Start investment with broader Early Help, Family First and Public Health resources, maximising efficiencies and reducing duplication of spend

- Ensuring expenditure explicitly supports service delivery in neighbourhoods of highest deprivation, consistent with national expectations that hubs prioritise disadvantaged families
- Investing in and embedding digital front door development (booking systems, online offer, AI enabled pathways) to strengthen access and reduce inequalities in engagement

Knowsley is establishing a new Children and Young People's Partnership and developing a new Children and Young People's Plan with 4 priority outcomes (safe, happy, healthy and achieving). In future, progress with delivery of the Best Start Local Plan and development and delivery of Knowsley's Best Start Partnership Strategy will be reported to the Children and Young People's Partnership Board.



# KEY TRANSFORMATION ACTIVITY: IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

In broad terms, a high-level implementation timeline for the delivery of key transformation action within Knowsley's Family Hub Programme delivery plan for 2026/27 is as follows:

- **2026-27:**
  - Finalise and seek approval for a revised Best Start Partnership Strategy
  - Review and develop wider Strategic Direction & commissioning intentions
  - Embed current Hub model consistently across targeted areas including community grants, peer led support and universal perinatal mental health prevention approaches
  - Continue to strengthen school readiness and speech and language developmental pathways
  - Continue to improve digital front door
- **2027-28:**
  - Re-commission elements of the current offer following strategy development
  - enhance integrated workforce training
  - embed peer approaches and community grants
  - Develop and refine data sharing and performance measurement



# PERFORMANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT



## Performance Framework

Knowsley implements a comprehensive performance framework aligned to the national Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies guidance, ensuring delivery is outcome focused, evidence based and able to demonstrate impact for families. The framework draws on indicators across health, early education, family help and Start for Life strands, in line with the performance expectations outlined in the programme's implementation guidance.

Key elements include:

### (i) Outcome Focused Measurement

Performance will be monitored against priority early years outcomes, including:

- **Good Level of Development (GLD)**, aligned to the national mission to achieve 75% GLD by 2028
- Early speech, language and communication development via Wellcomm progression to 'green'
- Parental wellbeing and perinatal mental health intervention outcomes via pre and post intervention assessment
- Infant feeding (including breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates)
- Child health and development metrics (e.g. uptake of mandated health visits, immunisation uptake, healthy weight, dental health metrics etc)

These outcomes reflect the national expectation to improve child development and reduce inequalities through integrated early support.

### (ii) Service Performance Monitoring

Performance is measured across the core Family Hub service areas required nationally, including:

- Parenting support
- Infant feeding
- Perinatal mental health and parent infant relationships
- Early language and home learning
- Access to the Start for Life offer and parent/carer panels

Each area includes a mix of reach, timeliness and outcome metrics, monitored quarterly via the current Department for Education Management Information data return which is currently submitted quarterly.

In addition, the partnership self-assesses against the current Family Hub model Maturity Matrix on an annual basis, with the 2025/26 self-assessment due to be submitted in Q1 of 2026-27.

### (iii) Developing data, Intelligence and future reporting

As part of the emerging Best Start in Life Strategy, Knowsley will aim to strengthen data sharing and analytical capability to underpin high quality reporting and continuous improvement. This will include:

- Multi agency data sharing agreements aligned to Start for Life transformation expectations
- Development of shared dashboards covering activity, outcomes, equity of access and locality based insight
- Quarterly reporting to the DfE and DHSC on delivery, spend and progress against milestones

## Risk Management

Knowsley maintains a clear and proactive risk management approach that aligns with national expectations for strong governance, assurance and oversight of Family Hub delivery.

### (i) Strategic and Operational Risks

Key risks monitored through the programme's governance arrangements include:

- **Workforce capacity and recruitment challenges**, especially in midwifery, health visiting and specialist Start for Life roles
- **Delivery of funded service expectations**, including maintaining co location, accessibility and minimum service standards across hub sites
- **Data integration challenges**, affecting the ability to monitor reach, outcomes and inequalities
- **Financial risks**, such as pressures on local budgets and constraints within the Best Start Family Hub grants
- **Engagement risks**, including lower reach among vulnerable, isolated or seldom heard groups
- **Dependency on multi agency systems**, particularly where national workforce shortages or partner pressures impact local delivery

### (ii) Controls and Mitigations

Current mitigation strategies in Knowsley include:

- Strengthening joint workforce planning across health, early years and Early Help
- Continual improvement of data infrastructure, shared reporting tools and a digital front door
- Quarterly financial oversight and compliance reporting aligned to the DfE grant assurance process

- Expanding targeted outreach and community engagement to reduce inequalities in take-up and ensure delivery in high deprivation areas meets national requirements
- Regular review of risk registers by the Early Help Governance Group, with escalation routes into the Council's corporate governance arrangements where required. Governance is being reviewed and reporting and escalation may change in the future



