



Early Years Strategy 2024 – 2026



Children's Services
in Bedford Borough



“Right support *Right action* **Right time**”

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES



At the heart of everything we do

Introduction

Bedford Borough's Early Years Strategy brings together the priorities for Bedford Borough's youngest residents ensuring they get the best start. The Early Years Strategy is informed by the evidence in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment of the health and wellbeing needs of people in Bedford Borough, The Family Hub's Needs Assessment, Childcare Sufficiency data and national data profile for Early Years.

This strategy is also informed by the Corporate vision, Children's Services Strategy and consultations with early years settings, parents and carers across Bedford Borough.



The framework diagram (figure 1) shows how the vision links to both corporate vision, our commitment to children and young people, our outcomes framework and our conditions for success.



EARLY YEARS STRATEGY - OUR VISION

Our vision

“We are committed to putting the needs of children and families at the centre of everything we do. We believe that working together with families, communities and partner agencies in an integrated way will deliver high quality early years services which will meet the needs of all our children. Bedford’s youngest children deserve the best start and we will put quality at the heart of our services.”

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

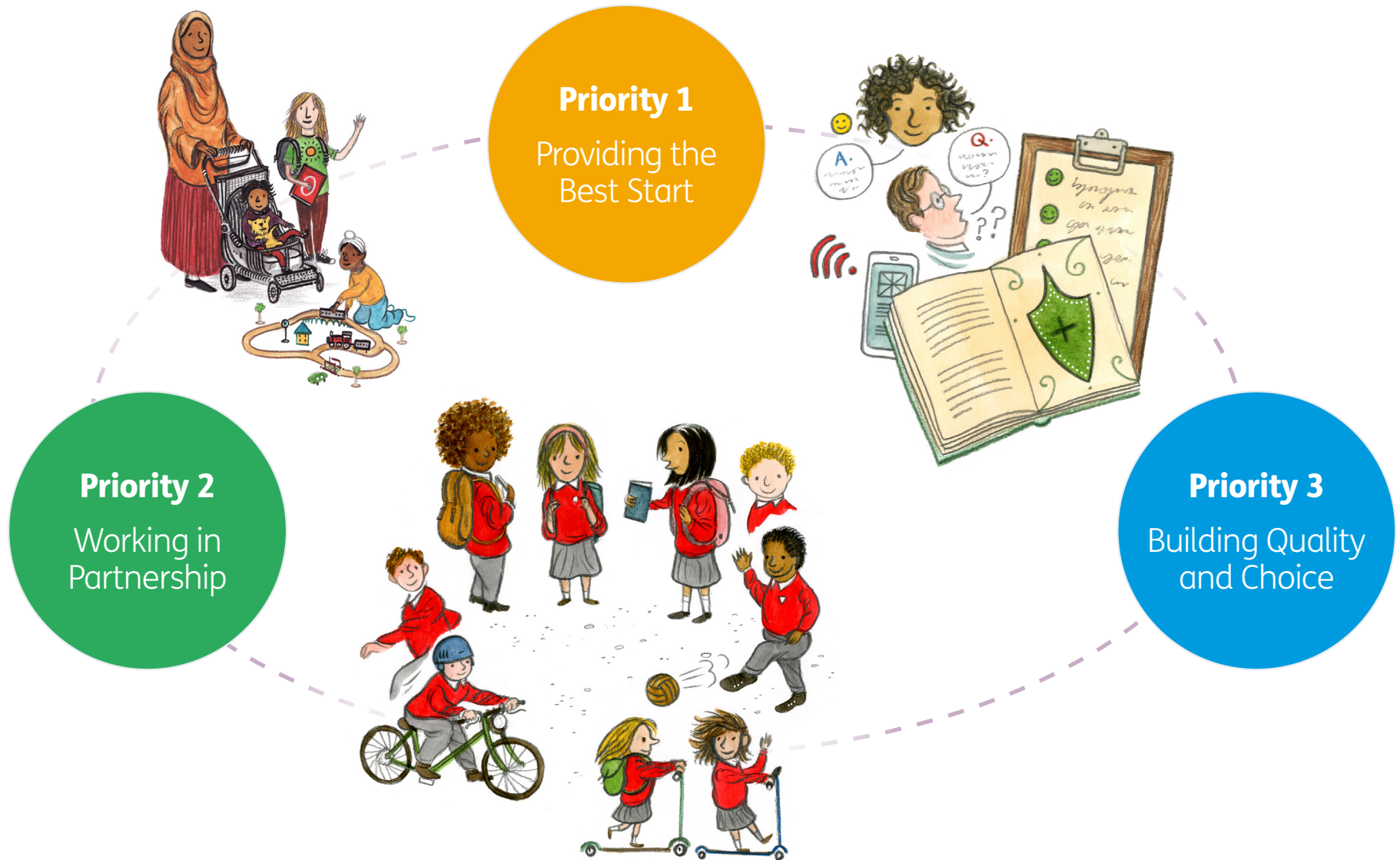
If we get it right in the Early years our children will grow to be resilient, confident adults in our society. We know that giving babies and children the Best Start supports individuals to reach their best potential in later life. The first 1001 days are a critical time for development. Events that happen during this crucial time can have a lasting impact on a child’s physical and mental health into adulthood. Children in their early years should have access to high quality care and education and every parent and carer should feel supported through a network of services including Family Hubs, Children’s Centres, health professionals, peer support and voluntary sector organisations.

The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on our youngest children’s physical development, communication, language and social and emotional wellbeing. There has been an increase in families accessing targeted children centre support. There is an increase of early years

families who are struggling financially and have accessed the food voucher scheme. Parents, carers and grandparents deserve high quality early years support within Bedford Borough. As a result of these challenges and those outlined on page 8 we have continued to provide universal children centre services throughout the Borough and we have continued to meet our Early Years Statutory Duties by increasing capacity in the Early years team and to services that support children with Special educational needs.

This Early Years Strategy will continue to ensure effective early years services, advice and guidance are in place to support families, ensuring babies and young children are happy, healthy and ready to learn. Bedford Borough intends to build upon our successes in early years by delivering the overarching ambitions of the Early Years Strategy which are to: Provide the Best Start, Work in partnership and Build Quality and Choice. To achieve this we will ensure our plans are targeted throughout the first five years of life: **giving children and young people the best start in life.**

Giving children and young people the best start in life



A snapshot of key Early Years challenges in Bedford Borough

Children in Bedford are achieving as well as children nationally, however the achievement levels are below those achieved before the pandemic.

Increased levels of support are being requested by parents, early years settings and schools for children in the early years who are struggling to self regulate their emotions and behaviour.

Special Educational Needs

More children are being identified with SEND

Settings report they are struggling to provide spaces due to lack of staff/space

Speech and Language

There has been an increase in families requiring early years speech and language drop in service. On average 43 new families are seen per quarter and only 12% of those could be discharged after initial consultation

Attachment

Between July 2022- July 2023
723 Parents have accessed attachment groups. Attachment Play and learn sessions in the first year of the child's life were the most accessed services

Poverty

There has been an increased number of calls to the Family Information Service from families who require financial support

A Healthy Start

- Around 1 in 10 children (10.1%) in Reception (aged 4-5 years) were living with obesity. Bedford remains the 4th highest compared to its 15 statistical neighbours.

Parenting

Between July 2022-July 2023 there have been: 170 families referred for 1:1 targeted parenting support.

Multiple Early Help needs, parenting and Mental Health & Wellbeing were the top three accessed services

Insufficient Staffing and childcare places

Job adverts for early years staff have increased by 45% since before the pandemic, impacting on childcare spaces available. There are insufficient childcare spaces particularly in new housing development areas

Safeguarding

August 2023- 277 under 5s are subject to a CP/CIN/LAC Care plan, of which 56 are LAC, 80 CP, and 141 CIN

For more information see: www.bedford.gov.uk/jsna

OUR PRIORITIES

1. Providing the Best Start

Why is this important?

- Enabling all children to have the best start sets the foundations for good health and wellbeing throughout life. The early years in every child's life are a crucial period which sets them up to thrive at home, educationally and beyond
- We recognise that parents are their child's first and most enduring educator. High quality, accessible support for parents during pregnancy and at all stages of their child's early years development is crucial
- The pandemic has made the role of parenting more challenging. Many parents did not have access to family or peer support during lockdowns and children did not have access to crucial early year's groups. Working to address the impacts of the pandemic will be a focus and providing a range of accessible support, both face to face and virtual will be a priority of this strategy

We will measure this outcome through 3 outcome statements

- Parents, early year's settings and schools will be child ready.
- Family Hub, Children's Centre and early years services will be accessible and of high quality
- Parents will be supported at the earliest point of need to be their child's first and most enduring educator

What we will do

- Continue to develop the Best Start Bedford Borough website
- Continue to evolve our Children's Centres and work with our partners to implement Family Hubs across Bedford Borough
- Provide structures and systems which enable knowledge and skills to be shared across the early years, health and education workforce
- Increase our virtual parenting support offer



2. Working together

Why is this important?

- We know that co-production with families is highly effective in improving children's outcomes. Early Years settings who engage effectively with parents have a positive impact on the home learning environment
- Professional partnerships are crucial in supporting families with young children effectively. Working efficiently and maximising resources are essential if we are to meet the needs of the growing number of families in Bedford Borough with young children and in particular the growing number of young children with SEND

We will measure this outcome through 3 outcome statements

- Parents can access the right support and advice from the right professional at the right time
- Parents will be empowered to coproduce policy and influence practice and services
- Partnership working will ensure children in the early years have access to an integrated review

What we will do

- Provide families with high support and advice through the Family Information Service
- Implement face to face and virtual Parent Panels to enable parents to have a voice in service developments, including Family Hubs
- Enable, through data sharing agreements, the sharing of data to ensure all families are supported from the point they are expecting a baby until they start school.
- Develop a network of volunteers across the Family hubs and children's centres



3. Building Quality and Choice

Why is this important?

- We know that children who access high quality early education and childcare before they start school have improved educational outcomes. By the age of three, children from poorer backgrounds could on average be as much as a year behind their more advantaged peers so it is vital that early education and childcare provision is delivered to the highest standard to help support equality of outcomes
- As Bedford Borough's new housing developments increase, the need for childcare also increases and there is currently a shortage of early years practitioners to provide sufficient childcare places especially in some areas of Bedford Borough. We also know that parents want childcare which suits the needs of their child and enables them to work and work flexibly

We will measure this outcome through 3 outcome statements

- Parents and carers can access sufficient high quality education and childcare that is accessible and meets the needs of their child
- Working in the Early Years and Childcare Sector in Bedford Borough will be an exciting career option
- Early Years settings in Bedford Borough will provide children with the highest quality childcare and early education provision

What we will do

- Ensure all Early Years practitioners have access to high quality evidence based training and qualifications
- Promote and embed Early Years and Childcare as a career option through the development of recruitment materials
- Ensure a high quality early years workforce who can support early identification and good outcomes for children with SEND
- Continue to support enquiries to expand or set up new childcare to build choice in Bedford Borough
- Work with providers to look at possibilities of increasing their wrap around and holiday childcare offer, reduce waiting lists and understand childcare demand
- Undertake further analysis of data on the childcare need generated by new housing developments across the Borough.
- The Early Years team to work with Planning and School Organisation to ensure data is accurate and can inform childcare sufficiency planning and to join the school places board to ensure a comprehensive understanding of early years, childcare and school places is known and understood.



Early Years Outcomes Framework

Providing the Best Start

Outcome	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents, early year's settings and schools will be child ready 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted Judgement data Transition to school data End of Foundation Stage data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Hub, Children's Centre and early years services will be accessible and of high quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's Centre registration rates Children's Centre attendance rates Oral Health and Obesity under fives data Family Hub data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents will be supported at the earliest point of need to be their child's first and most enduring educator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated Review Data Parenting Support data Family Hub data

Working Together

Outcome	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents can access the right support and advice from the right professional at the right time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Help Assessment for under fives data Analysis of Best Start Bedford Borough Website usage Family Information Service data Increase in speech and language support through the number of Chattertots groups Numbers of parents with young children with SEND accessing sensory provision at Children's Centres Family Hub data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents will be empowered to coproduce policy and influence practice and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents Panels are established
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership working will ensure children in the early years have access to an integrated review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated Review data

Building Quality and Choice

Outcome	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and carers can access sufficient high quality education and childcare that is accessible and meets the needs of their child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare Sufficiency data Growth in the number of childcare and early years places
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working in the Early Years and Childcare Sector in Bedford Borough will be an exciting career option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of practitioners entering the workforce Number of early years and childcare places increases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Years settings in Bedford Borough will provide children with the highest quality childcare and early education provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of practitioners completing higher level qualifications Number of settings achieving Good or Outstanding Ofsted Judgements Achieving Continuous Excellence (ACE) data Number of early years settings implementing the Environmental Rating Scales

DELIVERING THE EARLY YEARS STRATEGY

Delivering the Early Years Strategy

The Child Health and Wellbeing Partnership Group task the Early Years Reference Group with the development and implementation of the action plan to achieve the objectives set out in this strategy.

**Child Health and Wellbeing
Partnership Group**

**Early Years
Reference Group**



Glossary

Achieving Continuous Excellence (ACE): Achieving Continuous Excellence in the Early Years (ACE) is a quality improvement programme in Bedford Borough. Every Early years' setting is provided an ACE Contact (a council early years officer). The Achieving Continuous Excellence (ACE) programme aims to raise the quality and standards of all our early years' settings, including nurseries, preschools, childminders and reception classes in schools.

ACE Framework: The Achieving Continuous Excellence (ACE) framework encourages the early years setting to complete an ACE Plan (development plan) to identify priorities within their early years setting for the year ahead. The framework identifies clear priorities that supports the early years setting to have a clear focus on what those priorities are and how they will achieve them.

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment: Local Authorities in England have a duty to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient (enough) childcare to meet the requirements of parents in their area who require childcare in order to work or to undertake training or education to prepare for work. To support us to achieve this we carry out a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment consulting with all early years providers, housing, planning, and businesses within the Borough to understand availability of spaces, new housing developments and any new planning applications to open an early years provision.

Child Protection Plan: After a child protection meeting, the people who were involved in the meeting will draw up a plan to protect the child. This is called a Child protection plan.

Children Centre: Children Centres provide services for parents/carers and children from birth to five. They deliver parenting classes and other activities from locally based children centres. They also work with other partners/ professionals at the children centres to meet the needs of the family.

CIN: Child in need. A child in need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled.

Co-Production: Co-production recognises children and young people, parent carers and professionals as assets that all have important contributions to make due to their differing knowledge, skills and experience.

CP: Child Protection. This made when a child is judged to be at risk of significant harm, significant harm being a level of harm that affects the health, welfare and development of a child.

Early Help: Early Help is the term used to describe arrangements and services that provide help for children, young people and families as soon as a problem starts to emerge, or when there is a strong likelihood that problems will emerge in the future. Early help support can be sourced from your Local Authority.

Early Years Education: Early childhood education and care refers to any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age. Nurseries, Preschools, and Childminders offer early education to all children.

Early Years Provision/Setting: The term 'early year's provision' means the provision of a combination of early learning, care and development for a young child. Examples of early years provision are Nurseries, Preschools, Childminders, and out of school clubs.

Early Help Assessment (also referred to as an EHA): The Early Help Assessment also referred to, as an EHA is a partnership process designed to help professionals support children, young people and families. An Early Help Assessment (EHA) is designed to help a child receive the right support at an early stage.

Environmental Rating Scales: The environmental rating scales are designed to assess quality in an early years setting. Process quality consists of the various interactions that go on in an early years setting between the staff, children, the parents/carers, and among the children themselves. The environmental rating scales also looks at the materials and activities within the early years settings. They are scored and the early years setting are supported by the council if applicable to make improvements.

Early Years Reference Group: The Early Years Reference Group is made up of different local agencies and organisations, including those in health and education. They meet on a regular basis and make sure that services for children under five are being implemented in the Borough.

EY: Early years.

EYFS: The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is a set standard for the learning, development and care of your child from birth to 5 years old. All Schools and Ofsted-registered early years' providers must follow the EYFS, including childminders, preschools, nurseries and school reception classes.

Family Hubs: The Family Hubs are for parents and carers to access a range of integrated services to support infant feeding, parenting, perinatal mental health and learning in the early years. Family Hubs also provide information, advice and guidance to parents with children up to the age of 19 (25 with SEND)

FIS: Family Information Service. Provides free and confidential information and advice to help you in your family life. Parents, carers, children, young people and professionals working with families can find the services they need. The Family Information Service can help you to find childcare, children's activities, sport and leisure services, family support groups or services for children with a disability.

Integrated Review: The health team carry out developmental and health checks when a child is between the ages of 3 and 3 ½. These are known as Integrated checks or reviews. However, if the Nursery, Preschool or Childminder identify concerns around a child's development or health then the integrated checks/reviews can be carried out earlier, so that support can be put in place for the child and their family.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA): The Bedford Borough Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) is a local assessment of current and future health and social care needs. The Local Authority uses data and information from a range of sources, including hospitals, to understand more about the nature and causes of disease and ill health in their local area.

LAC: Looked After Child. For a wide range of reasons, a number of children and young people are placed under Local Authority care. Either they will be placed in family placements, with foster carers or placed for adoption.

LAC Care Plan: Every child that is a looked after child (LAC) must have a care plan in place. The Care Plan should identify the overall aim, for the child of being in care and the potential timescales involved.

PVI: Private, Voluntary or Independent. Refers to early years settings who have identified their business structure as either private, voluntary (charitable) or independent.

Settings: Settings refers to early years provisions such as, Nurseries, Preschools and Childminders.

Finding out more

If you would like further copies, a large-print copy or information about us and our services, please contact us at our address below.

Për Informacion

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Per Informazione

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