

Bradford District Best Start Local Plan



2026-2029

Introduction

In the Bradford District, we are ambitious for our children and families. We want every child to have the best possible start in life, because the earliest years shape their future health, learning and life chances in lasting ways.

The **Bradford District Best Start in Life Local Plan** sets out how we will turn that ambition into action, from pregnancy, through to age five and beyond. It sits within Bradford's **Prevention and Early Help Strategy 2026–2031**, strengthening our commitment to reduce inequalities and support families before challenges escalate.

This local plan has been coproduced by multi-agency partners including Bradford Children and Families Trust; Bradford Council; Public Health; Born in Bradford; the ICB; wider health services; and early years, education, community and voluntary organisations.

The voices of Bradford district's families have also helped shape our priorities. This coproduction will continue, to guide further, detailed planning and delivery of the plan.

Bradford is a district of great strengths, with diverse communities, strong family networks, and committed professionals. However, too many of our children experience disadvantage.

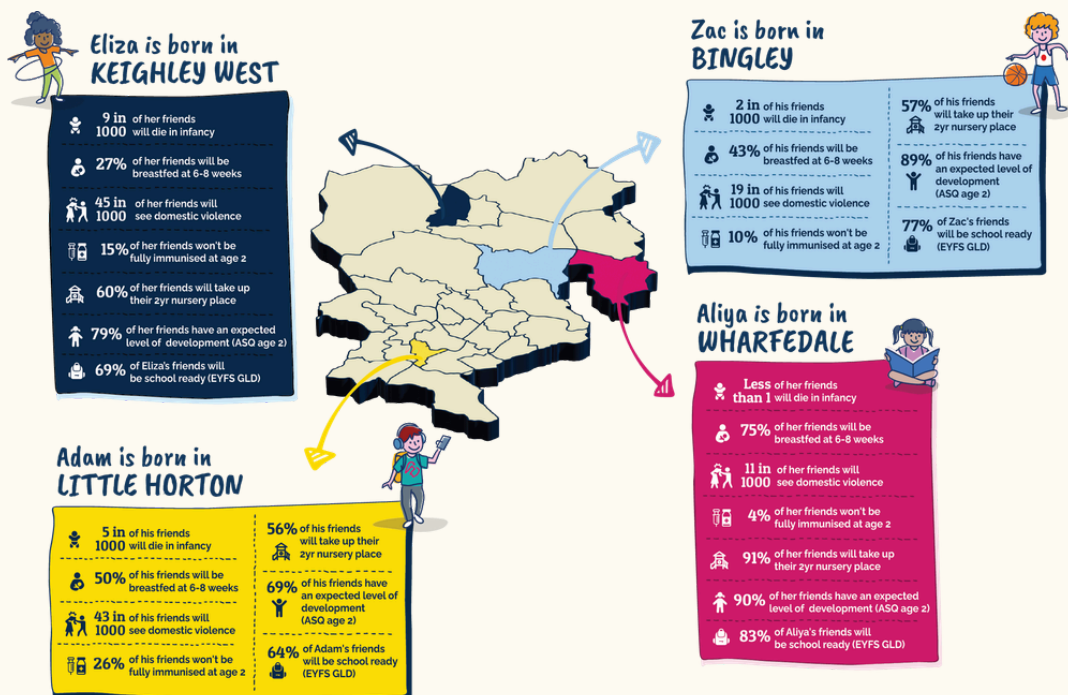


Our data shows huge differences in outcomes for children between affluent and deprived areas, and varied needs based on the cultural and ethnic diversity of areas. Through this plan we will use segmented, local data to ensure support is proportionate to local need, and not district averages.

Lasting change requires sustained commitment and collaboration. We will continue to build a system that works with families, making sure that we work restoratively, while making it easier for families to access the right help at the right time, especially for the most disadvantaged.

By investing in the earliest years, we invest in Bradford's future. Together, we can ensure that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential and get the best start in life.

Image source: Bradford District Prevention and Early Help Strategy 2026-2031



Theory of Change

A 'theory of change' is a map that joins the dots from what the problem is, to the planned solutions.

This Best Start local plan theory of change considers the 'problem' of school readiness, the causes behind this, what is needed to change this (solutions), working through the actions, outputs and impacts.

'Pre-conditions' and 'assumptions' are needed to make the change, but are outside of the control of the Best Start local plan.



Pre-Conditions

Everyone working together across the early years system towards a shared vision of effective prevention, from conception to the end of reception, using a lifecourse approach and ensuring support is proportionate to need.

One accountability framework.

A commitment to a single early years offer to families through a "seamless pathway" of services.

Everything is evaluated using the Bradford Evaluation Framework (test and learn approach).

Action to address child poverty as a major cause of inequalities in family capacity and child development opportunities.



Problem/Need

Only 62% of Bradford district children are school ready, dropping to as low as 50% in some areas. Boys, children living in poverty, and White Other children are the most affected. At the same time, services are siloed and operating with limited capacity, reducing their overall effectiveness.

Causes of the Problem

Increasing pressures on family life, including challenges such as excessive screen time, can make it harder for some parents to feel confident in supporting their child's development.

Many families remain unreached by existing services, while the scale of the challenge in Bradford is significant, with around 7,000 children born each year, 4,000 growing up in the most deprived areas, and 2,500 not school ready.

Services are further fragmented across budgets, data, service offers, targets and workforce, resulting in scattered and uncoordinated interventions.

Solutions

Families need accessible, relevant, engaging and proportionate support to help build their knowledge, skills and capacity to promote healthy child development. This requires a consistent, whole-system approach across Bradford district that empowers families and ensures they receive the right support at the right time.

Actions

Family Hubs are re-established with embedded Early Years Connector roles, bringing services together to offer a complementary and coordinated package of support using a proportionate universalism approach. The system shifts from reactive to proactive, with integration across budgets, resources, workforce training and service alignment. A single workforce strategy is implemented, with aligned training to support consistent delivery.

Outcomes – Short-Term

Families receive seamless support from conception through to the end of reception. They are better supported and more empowered to engage with services, while also receiving consistent messaging. Services are co-located within Family Hubs, improving accessibility and coordination.

Impacts

As a result, 75% of children achieve school readiness. Families become more confident, engaged and financially secure. The system becomes integrated, proactive and co-produced, with Family Hubs embedded in the heart of communities. At a wider level, this contributes to improved educational attainment, reduced youth offending and broader economic benefits.



Theory of change completed in partnership with Born in Bradford



Assumptions

National policy continues to prioritise equity in the early years.



There is a focus on enhancing the home learning environment and proper guidance on screen time from birth.

The joint provision in Bradford learns from the successful past approaches e.g Best Start / SureStart / City of Culture.



Local assets, communities and businesses are able to support these plans.

There is sufficient funding in Bradford to address the scale of the problem OR there is local agreement to a step-change approach – deliver an optimal service in some high need areas to demonstrate the impact and understand the true cost of district wide roll out.

The individual early years services in Bradford district are committed to taking an integrated approach and remove "competition".

Foundations to Flourish: Bradford District's Early Years' Needs Analysis

Population and Births

7000

children born every year (avg)

12%

reduction in 0-4 age group from 2011 – 2021 (*5)

155,602 children and young people aged 0-19



43,359 aged 0-5 (*3)

48,190 aged 6-11

49,384 aged 12-17

14,669 aged 18-19



Families and Early Years

38%

(469) of homeless households had dependent children, including 298 single-parent households.



38%

residents in Bradford speak a language other than English as their main language at home.

50%

of births are to mothers from Minority Ethnic populations (*5)



of births are in socially deprived areas

34%

73.7 per 10,000

premature births -3.3 vs England (*1)

87.9 per 10,000

Infant admissions under 14 days -6.8 vs England

Breastfeeding Initiation Rate -5.3 vs National

66.6%

55.5%

Breastfeeding Rate at 6-8 weeks -0.1 vs National (*4)

Child Health

74.4%

of children (ages 4-5) have healthy weight -0.5 vs England (*1)



37.1%

dental decay at age 5

85.2%

of children have their MMR vaccination at age 2 -3.7 vs England (*1)

84.5%

of children have their MMR vaccination at age 5 -2.1 vs England (*1)

Poverty and Deprivation

63.8%

eligible for free school meals (*5)

13th

most deprived local authority in England (*5)

59%

59% of children live in the most deprived decile

31.2%

absolute poverty (15.6% national) (*1)

36.7%

relative poverty (19.8% national)

IMD Decile

% GLD not met

1

63.8%

2

63.8%

3

63.8%

4

63.8%

% of children in IMD not meeting a good level of development (*5)

225.4 per 1,000



emergency admissions (0-4) +58.4 vs England (*1)

139.5 per 10,000

injury admissions (unintentional and deliberate) (0-4) +36.3 vs England

453.8 per 100,000

Admissions for dental decay (0-5) +230.2 vs England

Child Development ^(*1)

76%

of children had their 2 to 2.5 year health review (ASQ-3)

+2.0% vs England

82%

of children were at or above expected levels in all five areas of development

+0.8% vs England

89.0%

Communication

+1.4% vs England

95.2%

Gross Motor

+1.6% vs England

94.7% ^(*1)

Fine Motor

+1.0% vs England

91.9%

Problem Solving

-1.0% vs England

91.3%

Personal-Social

-0.4% vs England



Early Years Foundation Stage

61.9%

Overall Good level of Development

-6.4% vs National

70.5%

New target

586 children to achieve target

^(*1 and *3)

50.4%

Children on Free School Meals

-0.9% vs National

60.6%

New target

116 children to achieve target

^(*1 and *3)

75.8%

Communication and language

-3.74 vs National

81.2%

Physical Development

-3.53 vs National

^(*1 and *3)



70.0%

Maths

-7.65 vs National

63.1%

Literacy

-7.36 vs National

80.2%

Personal, social and emotional development

-2.87 vs National

73.4%

Understanding the world

-0.4% vs England

78.6%

Expressive arts and design

-6.40 vs National

^(*1 and *3)

Early Years Entitlement & Provision

367

Early Years Settings

141

School based Nurseries

157

Infant/Primary Schools

64.69%

take up of the 2 year old Families in receipt of additional support element

69.04%

take up of all entitlement 2 year olds (Families in receipt of additional support and/or Working Parenting Element)

85.05%

take up of the 3 and 4 year old universal offer

^(*3)



Quality

99.04%

Early Years Settings Ofsted Good or Above rating

100%

of nursery schools achieve Good or better Ofsted reports ^(*1 and *3)

94%

of overall Primary schools have better than expected standards (147 out of 157) Ofsted reports ^(*3)



With thanks to Nesta Playbook ^(*1), Department of Education ^(*2), Bradford Council ^(*3), Public Health ^(*4), and Born in Bradford ^(*5) for their contribution to the data.



Vision. Every child in Bradford grows up safe, loved and ready to learn, supported by trusted, joined-up services and strong community networks that are easy to find, easy to use and culturally attuned to family strengths. From pregnancy to school and beyond, support is timely, practical and preventative, ensuring children thrive and inequalities narrow across our district.

Mission. To deliver an integrated early years system that raises levels of development, tackles the impact of inequities and deprivation, strengthens early communication, increases take-up of entitlements, and ensures fair access to high-quality early education, childcare and play, while providing timely, coordinated support for children, giving every child the strongest start in life.

Strategic ambitions

Every family gets the right support at the right time

Families can access support easily through clear, trusted, local routes, delivered by professionals who understand their communities and provide practical help, pulling in other when needed.

High quality early years experiences for every child

All children access inclusive, affordable, high quality early years education, childcare home learning and play opportunities, with smooth transitions into nursery and school.



A simple, joined up early years system across Bradford district

Best Start Family Hubs enable early education and childcare, maternity, health visiting, SEND, family support, mental health, voluntary and community sector work and communities to act as one system, sharing information and providing seamless pathways from conception to age five.

Accessible and inclusive services that reach those most in need

Families can access trusted, culturally responsive support in the heart of their communities - fully inclusive of all SEND and neurodiverse children and parents/carers, and available to all.

Bradford district children are ready for reception

Children begin school with the communication, social, emotional and physical skills to thrive; parents understand what "being ready" looks like and feel confident in supporting their children.

Working with parents and communities as equal partners

Families and communities shape the support they receive; services reflect the languages, cultures and strengths of Bradford's diverse populations.

A skilled and connected workforce

A district wide early years workforce that shares skills, training and leadership, delivering consistent, child development, culturally competent and trauma-informed practice.

System Enablers

- **Workforce** - Shared CPD pathways, joint training, consistent assessment tools and core practice standards across all sectors including private nurseries, schools and childminders.
- **Family connectors** - Proactive engagement focused on providing navigation and relational support.
- **Evidenced-based interventions** – Co-produced offers matched to local need, drawing on research, evidence and local innovation, supported by continuous evaluation and test-and-learn approaches that increase reach.
- **Pooled budgets and joint commissioning** - A districtwide prevention investment approach reducing fragmentation.
- **Best Start Outcomes Framework** - Providing visibility of activity, impact and progress across partners.



Strategic Outcomes

- Babies and children grow up healthy, safe and in loving homes with strong relationships. Families access timely, coordinated early help through simple, trusted routes that prevent escalation.
- Partners deliver integrated pathways using shared data, processes and outcomes to provide seamless support from conception to the end of reception.
- Parents and communities will shape priorities, design services and influence continuous improvement through regular feedback and partnership forums.
- All children can access inclusive, affordable play and high quality early learning that builds strong early development.
- Families are proactively reached and supported through trusted, community based services.
- More children start school with strong communication, social, emotional and physical development, narrowing inequalities.
- A unified early years workforce shares skills, tools and training, enabling consistent, high quality, culturally competent practice.
- Innovations that show measurable impact will be scaled through shared training, joint commissioning and integrated pathways.



What does success look like?

Families and communities

- Families know where to go for help and use a single, simple way in.
- More families take up early years entitlements and use their local Best Start Family Hub.
- Communities describe Bradford district's offer as welcoming, non judgemental and easy to access.
- More early conversations and stronger community connections mean needs are met earlier, closer to home.

Children

- Children grow up healthy, safe, stable and loved, with more chances to play, learn and thrive.
- Early identification leads to earlier action, with 2 - 2½ year reviews, integrated reviews and language checks improving outcomes.
- Children love reading, chatting and number exploring, and are ready for their school adventure.
- More children reach a good level of development, narrowing the gap.

Quality practice

- The right support, based on what we know works, helps strengthen early relationships, family wellbeing and children's development.
- Early years settings deliver consistently high quality learning, with skilled, inclusive, language rich practice.
- More dads are actively involved, and father inclusive practice is embedded everywhere.
- The Infant Feeding and Early Nutrition Strategy results in higher breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates, alongside healthier dietary habits in early childhood.

Workforce and system

- Families tell us support makes a real difference to daily life and their child's development.
- Practitioners feel valued, connected and confident supporting Bradford's diverse families.
- Local multi disciplinary teams work as one, sharing tools, assessments and pathways.
- Partners routinely share and use data to plan earlier.