

Best Start Local Plan

2026 to 2029



working together



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1. Foreword



Lewisham has a strong track record of putting families at the heart of how we design and deliver services.

As one of the original local authority pilots for Family Hubs and the Start for Life programme, we have built a borough wide offer that supports families from pregnancy through the early years, rooted in partnership with health, the voluntary and community sector and delivered through local hubs and outreach across Lewisham.

Since 2022, our focus has been on giving every child the best possible start in life by strengthening early language and home learning, infant feeding, parent–infant relationships, perinatal mental health and parenting support. This work aligns closely with the national direction set out by the Department for Education, including the commitment to Best Start Family Hubs in every local authority, expanded access to early education and childcare, a more inclusive and skilled early years workforce, and stronger health services for babies and young children.

The publication of Every Child Achieving and Thriving in February 2026 reinforces the importance of high-quality early years provision as the foundation for lifelong outcomes. Lewisham is well placed to respond to this ambition. Our Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme, underpinned by our Best Start Local Plan, sets out how we will build on what we have already achieved and continue to work with families and partners to ensure that every child and family in Lewisham can connect, grow and thrive over the next three years.

Sara Rahman
Executive Director Children and Young People

Foreword



Our Best Start in Life Local Plan sets out our shared commitment to giving every child in Lewisham the healthiest, happiest start possible. It reflects the ambitions of *Fit for the Future: the 10 Year Health Plan*¹, with a clear shift towards prevention and early support – recognising that lifelong wellbeing begins from pregnancy, the early years, and within the everyday places where families live, learn and connect.

Families have told us they want support that is easy to access, joined up and responsive. This plan answers that call. By working closely with parents, carers, local communities and partners across health, education, social care and the voluntary sector, we are strengthening the pathways that help children thrive – through early help, strong relationships and coordinated, high quality care.

A central part of this future is the development of **neighbourhood focused care**. As the NHS evolves, we are moving towards more models of support that are rooted in local communities, with professionals working together around the needs of families. Lewisham’s Neighbourhood Care model will bring services closer to communities, reduce fragmentation, and ensure families receive timely support in the settings they know best. This shift directly complements our Best Start ambition and will help make early intervention routine rather than reactive.

This Local Plan also aligns with the **Lewisham Health and Wellbeing Strategy**, which commits us to improving health for all residents and reducing inequalities. By acting on the underlying factors that shape health – such as housing, income and access to services – we can create the conditions in which every child has a fair chance to flourish.

Taken together, the Best Start Local Plan, neighbourhood focused care and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy form a powerful, locally driven approach to prevention. These are investments not just in today’s children, but in the long term wellbeing of our communities. Healthier children learn, grow and develop better – and those who thrive early are more likely to lead healthier lives as adults.

I am proud of the progress we have already made and even more excited by the progress ahead. By continuing to work alongside families and communities, we can ensure that every child in Lewisham – whatever their background – has the very best start in life.

Ben Travis
Chief Executive Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

¹ 10 Year Health Plan for England: fit for the future – GOV.UK

2. Introduction

In July 2025, the Government launched its strategy *“Giving every child the Best Start in Life”*, setting out its ambition to ensure that a child’s background does not determine their future success. The aim is for all children to develop well, learning to communicate, form relationships, manage emotions, play, and learn.

The Government is committed to raising the healthiest generation of children ever and ensuring that every child has the best possible start in life. This is also supported by the 10 Year Health Plan; fit for the future, released in July 2025, which outlines the changes necessary to transform the NHS, making it sustainable for generations to come and includes the delivery of neighbourhood health services as a key resource for local communities.

The Birmingham and Lewisham African and Caribbean Health Inequalities Review (BLACHIR²) 2022 shone a light on the structural racism, discrimination and neglect that led to poor health outcomes for Black

African and Black Caribbean communities Lewisham has continued to prioritise implementation of the opportunities for action with a progress report being published in January 2026.

Since 2022, the London Borough of Lewisham has been working with health, education and voluntary sector partners to deliver its Family Hub and Start for Life offer. This includes an area-based model with 8 sites across the four areas delivering a range of activities with partners to cover the Start for Life programme.

Across these sites we provide the four Start for Life Programmes:

- Early Language and Home Learning
- Infant Feeding Support
- Parent-Infant Relationships and Perinatal Mental Health
- Parenting Programmes



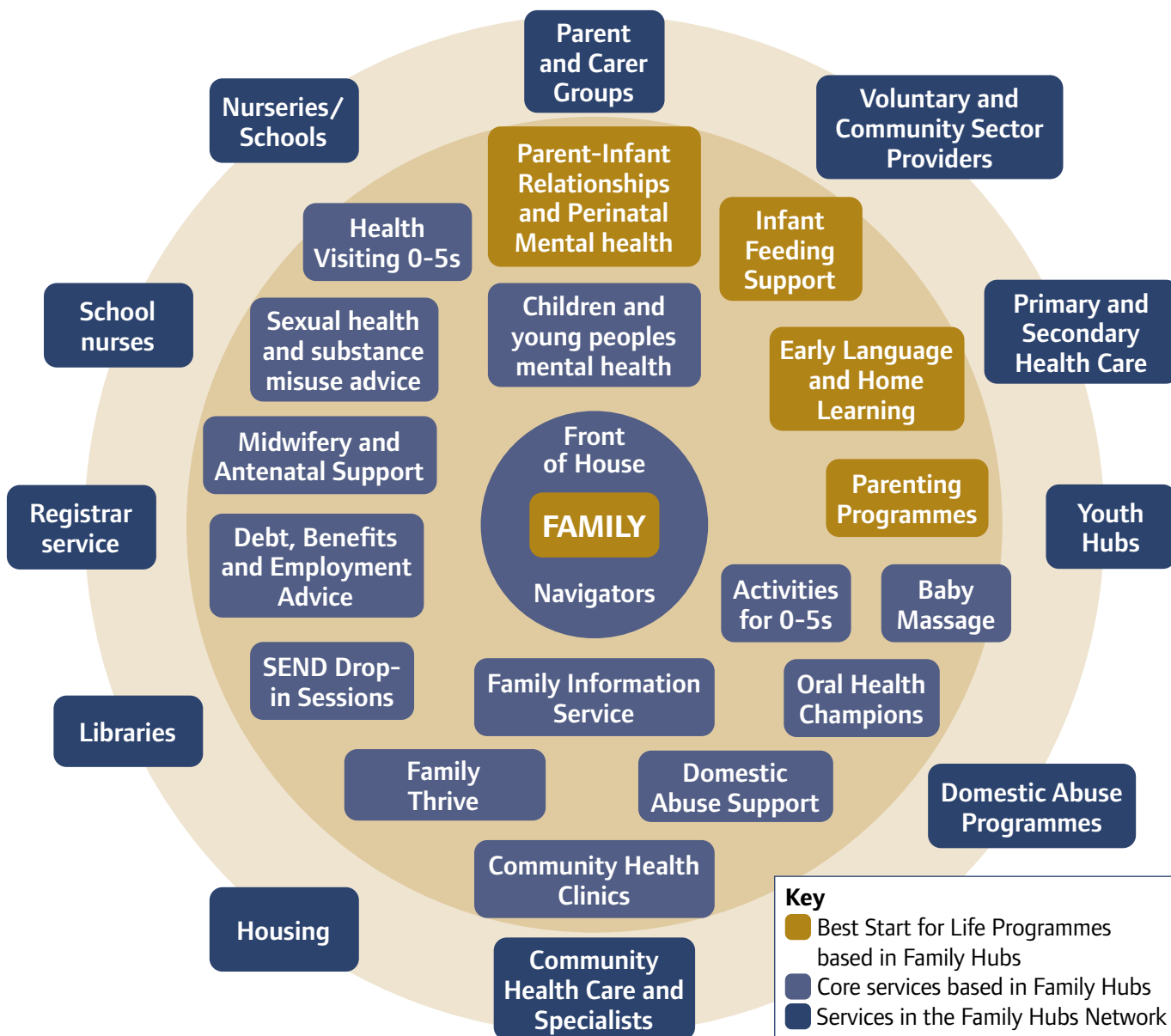
Lewisham Family hubs



In Lewisham, we have been working to create a more integrated and accessible system of support for families. The focal point for this is Best Start Family Hubs which are welcoming, inclusive spaces where parents can learn what healthy child development looks like, and how talking, playing, reading,

responding, and being physically active make a powerful difference. This support may come through activities like attending Stay and Play sessions, talking to a Family Navigator, meeting with a midwife or health visitor or participating in a parenting programme. Lewisham's model for delivering this is shown below.

Creating trusted places where families can connect, grow and thrive



Services available virtually, including static information or interactive

- Birth Registration
- Debt and Welfare Advice
- Domestic Abuse Support
- Early Language and Home Learning Environment
- Education and Care Support
- Health Visiting
- Housing
- Infant Feeding
- Information on Early Help Offer
- LA 0-19 Public Health services
- Mental Health Services
- Midwifery/maternity
- Nutrition/Weight Management
- Oral Health
- Parent-Infant Relationships and Perinatal Mental Health
- Parenting Support
- Reducing Parental Conflict
- SEND Support and Services
- Stop Smoking Support
- Substance misuse support
- Youth Services

Lewisham's Best Start Family Hubs are open to all families with children aged 0–19 (or up to 25 for those with SEND), with a particular focus on families with babies and young children, recognising this as a critical period for cognitive, physical, and emotional development. For families facing more complex challenges, the Hubs will help ensure they receive the right support at the right time with partners on site such as Department of Work and Pensions, Citizens Advice.

In February 2026, the Government released its white paper, Every Child Achieving and Thriving which gives an ambition for high quality education to start in the early years where the foundations for future success are laid. This focuses on disadvantaged children and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and has as an aspiration that the disadvantage gap is halved when this generation finishes secondary school. To support children with SEND, it will ensure that 'every Best Start Family Hub has a dedicated SEND Practitioner, backed by over £200 million investment over three years.

The Government has invested nearly £1.5 billion in the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme over the next three years to bring together early years and family services and improve child development outcomes. As part of this Lewisham has been set targets to increase the number of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of Reception by 2028.

Lewisham's targets for 2028 are:

- At least 80.0% of all children achieving a GLD (compared with 70.5% in 2025)
- At least 64.8% of children eligible for Free School Meals achieving a GLD (compared with 57.4% in 2025)

The Best Start Local Plan sets out how the Lewisham partnership will support families over the next 3 years to give their children the best start in life by targeting resources to focus on children experiencing the greatest disparities in Lewisham.



3. Context to Lewisham

Lewisham is an urban centre in southeast London, with a dynamic and diverse community, combining strong cultural heritage with modern connectivity and growth potential.

The borough spans approximately 14 square miles and is home to around 300,000 residents, with a notably young and multicultural population with over 35% of its residents born outside of the UK and 16.2% speaking a language other than English as their main language at home.

This demographic profile provides both opportunities and challenges for service delivery, economic development, and community engagement.

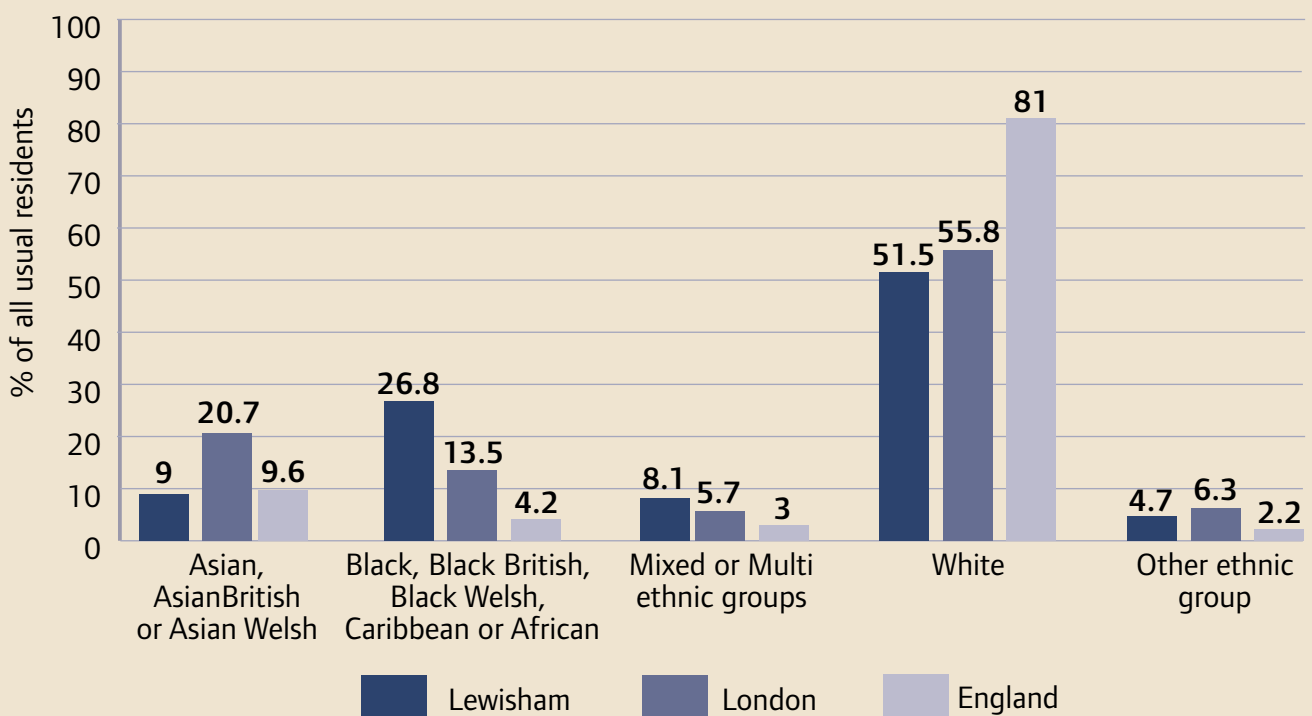
Lewisham has 69,482 children and young people, which includes 22,045 aged 0-5, 21,136 aged 6-11, 26,301 aged 12-19.

Lewisham’s identity is shaped by its rich history, vibrant cultural scene, and extensive green spaces, including Blackheath and Beckenham Place Park, which contribute to its appeal as a place to live, work, and invest.

Culturally, the borough benefits from assets such as Goldsmiths, University of London, the Horniman Museum, and the Broadway Theatre, reinforcing its role as a centre for creativity and learning. Combined with its diverse communities and strong sense of identity, Lewisham offers a foundation for inclusive growth and innovation.

Economically, Lewisham functions as a mixed-use area with retail, light industry, and education as key sectors. While local job density is below the London average, excellent transport links – including rail, DLR, and bus networks – facilitate strong connectivity to

Ethnically diverse groups (Census 2021)



central London and beyond. This positions Lewisham as a commuter hub with significant potential for inward investment and regeneration.

However, as at 2025, Lewisham is ranked 46 out of 153 Local Authorities on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), placing it in the more deprived category (top 30%). On the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), Lewisham is ranked 58, placing it in the more deprived category for child poverty (top 37%).

Lewisham is proud to be recognised as a borough of sanctuary, committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for people seeking safety and refuge. This status reflects the borough's dedication to supporting vulnerable individuals and families, fostering a sense of belonging, and promoting equality and compassion across its diverse communities.

This commitment aligns closely with the Best Start Local Plan vision, which aims to ensure that every child has the best possible start in life, regardless of background. The target we have been set is ambitious, but this is something we strive for in Lewisham through our values as well as ensuring we work together with our community and partners to ensure we can deliver an inclusive offer that all children benefit from and enabling families to connect, grow and thrive.

Lewisham was one of the 75 local authorities to receive funding for Family Hubs and Start for Life for the last 4 years which has enabled us to already have 4 Best Start Family Hub sites in place and 4 additional 'sites' in the community 'supporting Best Start in Life'. The Best Start Local Plan will build on the successes already achieved in Lewisham and strive to improve performance where it is needed.



4. Our vision

As part of our development of Family Hubs, a partnership group was formed called the Family Hubs Integrated Leadership Alliance (FHILA) which oversees the work of the Best Start Family Hubs and delivery of the Healthy Babies Programme.

This group and our Parent/Carer Advisory Board developed our 'common moral purpose' which includes our vision of supporting families to 'connect, grow and thrive'. This means creating and sustaining welcoming and safe spaces where families and young people feel they belong and can connect and grow to be what they want to be.

Our Best Start Local Plan builds on this vision by setting clear priorities for supporting families in the early years from conception to age 5.

Our aim through this plan is **for all children in Lewisham to develop well, learning to communicate, form relationships, manage emotions, play, and learn.**

This plan explains how we will achieve this through focusing on the priorities we have identified under:

- Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme
- Early Education and Childcare
- Strengthening Health Services



5. Governance arrangements

A Best Start Local Plan Working Group was established to develop the Local Plan for the next 3 years and to track progress. Their work will be overseen by the Family Hubs Integrated Leadership Alliance and will also feed into the Place Executive Group, NHS Integrated Care Board.

The Working Group consists of senior representatives from across the NHS and local authority. This includes Prevention and Family Advice, Health Visiting Services, Speech and Language Therapies, Early Years, Education, Family Help and Care, Children and Young People's Joint Commissioning, Children's Community Nursing, Public Health, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. This Local Plan was developed through partnership working with this group and consultation with parents and carers.

There are existing strong links in place between partners in the Council and Health Services, that have been developed over the last three years of work on the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programmes. These good working relationships are strengthened by the Children and Young People's Joint Commissioning Team, which operates across the local authority and NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB). There are clear synergies between the Local Plan, the work being undertaken by the ICB and health partners to deliver the Neighbourhood Health Plan, particularly the focus on early intervention and prevention, and delivery of support at a more local neighbourhood level.

The development of the Local Plan also spans statutory and non-statutory children's services, across

all levels of the Lewisham Continuum of Need. As a 'Pathfinder' local authority for the Children's Social Care reforms brought in by the national Families First for Children Programme, Lewisham is already on the journey to transforming how family support, early help and child protection are delivered through a family-led, neighbourhood based, multi-agency system of support. The principles of this programme align strongly with the principle of the Best Start Local Plan.

Governance for Early Years Education in Lewisham, sits within the Children and Young People (CYP) Directorate and is overseen by the Director of Education and the Education Senior Leadership Team (SLT), with delivery led through five frontline service areas covering Early Years Quality & Sufficiency, Access, inclusion and participation, School Improvement (Lewisham Learning), Integrated SEND Services, and wider education infrastructure. Together, these teams fulfil the local authority's statutory duties for childcare, early education, and school organisation, and align their work with the Education Strategy 2022–27, which prioritises sufficiency, school readiness, inclusion, and high-quality provision across early childhood and primary phases. Strategic and financial oversight is supported by the Schools Forum, while multiagency governance – through Best Start Family Hubs, the Safeguarding Children Partnership and SEND oversight arrangements – ensures integrated planning, early identification, and coherent pathways from birth through Reception and into primary education.

6. The needs of Lewisham’s babies, children, and families

When Lewisham started its Family Hub journey, a needs assessment was carried out to ensure that Family Hubs were placed in the areas of most need and highest deprivation and that the focus was on delivery of services that improved these outcomes.

The DfE stipulates that 70% of hubs should be located in the most deprived 30% areas nationally. In Lewisham 5 out of 8 (62.5%) of the hubs are located in the most deprived 30% areas.

Area	Sites	% of neighbourhoods in England this neighbourhood is more deprived than
Area 1 Brockley, Evelyn, Deptford, New Cross Gate, Telegraph Hill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best Start Family Hub – Deptford - Sites supporting Best Start in Life – Evelyn - Honor Oak Youth and Family Hub 	82% 80% 95%
Area 2 Blackheath, Crofton Park, Ladywell, Lee Green, Lewisham Central, Rushey Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best Start Family Hub – Ladywell - Site supporting Best Start in Life – Kaleidoscope 	61% 55%
Area 3 Catford South, Downham, Grove Park, Hither Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best Start Family Hub – Downham 	71%
Area 4 Bellingham, Forest Hill, Perry Vale, Sydenham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best Start Family Hub – Bellingham - Site supporting Best Start in Life – Eliot Bank 	83% 43%

A Theory of Change exercise was carried out with the Family Hubs Integrated Leadership Alliance which was used to identify priority areas based on 22/23 data. This found that:

- Parental mental health with 1 in 5 women in England experiencing a mental health problem during their pregnancy and in the first year after and 10% of fathers experiencing depression before or soon after the birth of their child.
- Rate of overweight and very overweight children of black ethnic origin in Reception Year was significantly higher than white ethnic origin.
- % of Lewisham 2-year-olds achieving the expected level of development in communication skills was lower than the national average.
- Although Attainment 8 was higher than England it was lower than London
- A&E Admissions for under 5s was higher than London and England

- Hospital Admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries in children aged 0-14 was higher than regional and England.
- There were a high number of referrals to Children's Social Care that did not meet their threshold suggesting their needs could be met through prevention services.
- Hospital Admissions for asthma for under 19s was higher than London and England.
- Population vaccination cover was reduced in most areas.
- High levels of smoking in pregnancy (higher than London, but lower than England)
- Inequalities in accessing services are reduced e.g. health visiting and school nursing.
- High levels of NEET in young people aged 16-17 and high unemployment rates generally
- High levels of deprivation e.g. over a third of Lewisham's children under 16 live in poverty. Increasing levels of poverty
- Homelessness for 16-24-year-olds was higher than London and England and families not in suitable housing and/or threatened with eviction/ at risk of homelessness.
- Hospital admissions for self-harming for 10-24-year-olds higher than London, but lower than England
- Higher rate of first-time entrants to the youth justice system than the London and England average
- Under 18 conceptions higher than London and England

Family Hub outcomes

Lewisham has been part of the London Family Hubs Community of Practice developing a common outcomes framework which can be used to demonstrate outcomes for families, babies, children and young people. As well as the Theory of Change indicators, outcomes can be measured against the following:



Safe
personal
security



Health
Physical
wellbeing



Happy
Social, emotional
and personal
wellbeing



Learning
Cognitive and
metacognitive
development



Engaged
Feel engaged in
a community

Priority for 2026 to 2029

An evaluation of progress made against the Theory of Change indicators and the Common Outcomes Framework will be carried out during 2026/2027 to identify areas where improvements need to be made.

Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND)

In the academic year 2024/25, 8116 pupils in Lewisham were identified as having Special Educational Needs in Lewisham.

Of these, Speech, Language and Communication needs was the most common primary need (2,933 pupils).

Early years settings in Lewisham identify children's needs through ongoing observation, close partnership with parents and carers, and the use of the Lewisham Early Years Ordinarily Available Provision, which sets out the inclusive strategies and support that should be in place for all children as part of everyday practice. When a child is not making expected progress despite this ordinarily available support, practitioners work with the SENCO to apply the graduated approach and, where appropriate, involve health professionals, or specialist services to ensure timely and coordinated support.

The SEND White Paper published in February 2026 said it would ensure that 'every Best Start Family Hub has a dedicated SEND Practitioner. This role will help parents to understand their child's development, identify emerging needs sooner and support vital join-up between early years settings, health visitors and SEND Team.

Priority for 2026 to 2029

Following confirmation of available funding, dedicated SEND Practitioners will be recruited for each of the 4 Best Start Family Hubs to provide support to families of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.



7. What children and families are telling us

An initial consultation exercise was conducted with the Family Hubs Parent/Carer Advisory Board which raised the following as ways to increase the GLD areas of reading and writing:

- Include Bookstart packs within Baby Boxes.
- Support parents and carers with understanding ages and stages of development through visual aids and resources.
- Expansion of library services into Family Hubs and other spaces.
- Reaching out to communities and raising awareness of how to support reading and writing skills. This links in with the expansion of the Moments that Matter campaign.
- Sharing REAL is a good programme but its promotion does not convey what the programme entails. This could be stronger by videos of parents and carers talking through the benefits of the programme and by promotional literature incorporating testimonials.
- There needs to be the recognition that parents and carers may have barriers with reading and writing themselves – either in terms of ability, anxiety, or bad experiences at school. Using the Moments that Matter campaign here to myth bust and make this accessible would be helpful and enhancing links with Adult Learning Lewisham (ALL) would be an important partnership to strengthen.
- Expanding the ‘Summer Reading Challenge’ through the libraries throughout the year would be helpful.

These recommendations have already been fed back to the Best Start Speech, Language and Communication Board for inclusion in their detailed action plan supporting the Local Plan.

A consultation survey was shared with parents/carers to seek feedback on the support that they needed to help their children achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD).

This was shared through a variety of routes, including Early Years Settings, the Family Nurse Partnership, families known to Family Help and Family Hubs, Health Visitors, Health Visitors, parents/carers of children with SEND.

The survey received 68 responses by 17 March and will remain open until the end of April 2026. Submissions were received from all 4 Family Hubs areas and from a range of ethnically diverse groups:

2%	Asian Bangladeshi
2%	Asian British
3%	Asian Chinese
7%	Asian Indian
8%	Asian Other
6%	Black-African
2%	Black British
7%	Black Caribbean
11%	Mixed Other
3%	Mixed White and Black African
39%	White British

The majority of responses were from parents/carers of children aged 4 and under with the most popular things to do at home with their children being reading or looking at books together, singing songs or rhymes, counting, sorting or number play and talking about your day.

Friends or family were the most common response to where do you usually find information or ideas about help your child at home, followed by social media (Instagram, Facebook or TikTok), talking to staff/childminders and then Family Hubs.

After email contact, parents/carers found the easiest way to receive information, or support was from a Stay and Play session.

Parents/carers asked for more support for ideas on simple activities to do at home with their children and also support around behaviour or routines.

The website that parents and carers were mostly aware of was the NHS Start for Life website.

If parents/carers were concerned about their child's learning or development the most frequent response was to visit their GP, followed by their Health Visitor. Family Hubs are investigating playing the Family Hubs video in GP Surgeries in Lewisham to raise awareness of the services offered.

There were requests for parents/carers for more evening and weekend sessions, and this is already being investigated.

Parents/carers found it can be difficult to search for information across multiple sites and would find it useful to have a guide to these.

Families would like more information on SEND Groups and support with their children with SEND. 'Every child achieving, every child thriving' says that funding will be made available for every Best Start Family Hub to have a dedicated SEND Practitioner.

Over 50% of the families who submitted a survey asked for a Family Navigator to contact them to discuss support their family may require.

Priorities

- Family Hubs to create simple, practical handouts to help parents and carers support their children with reading, writing, behaviour and everyday routines at home.
- Explore options to make it easier for families to find trusted information by adding clear links on the Family Hubs website, with short explanations of what support each website offers.



8. Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme

8.1 Best Start Family Hubs

8.1.1 Achievements so far

The delivery of Best Start Family Hubs is well underway in Lewisham with 4 Best Start Family Hubs in place and four additional sites which support delivery of the Best Start in Life activities.

Best Start Family Hubs offer welcoming, inclusive environments, where every 'family feels valued and confident to ask for support.' While they are open to all families with children aged 0-19 (or up to 25 for young people with SEND), they prioritise support for families with babies and young children – recognising this critical window for cognitive, physical, and emotional development. They will help identify emerging problems early and provide access to support – ensuring families receive the right help at the right time.

Family Hub activities include:

Stay and Play Sessions

Stay and Play sessions are provided by Early Years Practitioners across the sites and are spaces where service users will have a sense of familiarity and trust. The sessions aim to support the prime areas of learning in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development
- Communication and Language
- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

They can be used to raise the profile of other services across the partnership to ensure that support is accessed at the earliest opportunity to prevent any further escalation of need. This will be achieved by having 'guest slots' on rotation, which includes but is not limited to the services listed below and will take place termly:

- Bookstart
- Educational Psychologists
- Family Information Service
- Libraries
- Oral Health
- Infant Feeding Support
- School Admissions
- Speech and Language Therapists

Family Navigators

Lewisham has eight Family Navigators who offer free, confidential, non-judgemental support by connecting families with children aged 0-19 (25 with SEND) to local services.

They can:

- provide advice and information on a range of topics such as parenting support, housing, low mood and mental health, domestic abuse support, employment, and benefits.
- Connect families to the services they need support from via a Family Plan
- Issue food bank vouchers to families and refer for essential baby and child items.
- Help with form filling or just provide a listening ear to parents and carers.

The Navigators also provide outreach support in community spaces to families who may not access services currently. This can be via schools, libraries, health centres, coffee shops, supermarkets, parks, pharmacies, and barbers.

The Family Hubs offer in its entirety can be found at our website:

lewishamfamilyhubs.org.uk

Branding

The logo of Lewisham's Family Hubs was co-developed with our Parent and Carer Advisory Group and includes our vision of enabling families to connect, grow and thrive.

Our logo will be retained, but we will also adopt the Best Start in Life logo alongside this and will ensure sites display 'Funded by the UK Government' logo.



Sites that do not meet the full Family Hubs definition will demonstrate alignment to the programme through signage showing 'supporting Best Start in Life.'

Start for Life Services or offers will be replaced with Healthy Babies branding and terminology as materials are refreshed and updated. Our dedicated Family Hubs will be named 'Best Start Family Hub – followed by their location.

8.1.2 What data is telling us

Since our first Family Hub opened in 2023 to March 2026, we have registered over 11,000 mothers, fathers, grandparents, children or carers.

We want to ensure that activities held in Family Hubs attract families from the local area and are visited by those who are representative of the areas they live in. Currently 34% of those using Family Hubs are white, 45% are from ethnically diverse groups and 21% are unknown. We will ensure we do our utmost to capture missing ethnicity data so we can ensure our Family Hubs are being accessed by local people.

We are also keen to ensure fathers are represented at Family Hubs and have held a series of father only groups to facilitate this.

So far in 2025/26, over 155 sessions have been held in our Hubs ranging from Stay and Play activities such as Messy Play, Rhythm and Rhyme and Explorers Plus, Child Development Checks and Baby Weighing, Mindful Mums, Vitamin D Distribution, Breastfeeding Hub, Maternity Journalling.

For 2025/26, over 1,500 families have received advice and information, including support with mental and physical health, financial stability, housing, education, early years development, improving family relationships.

Where further support is required, a Family Navigator may work with the family on a Family Plan and over 150 plans have been created this year, supporting families with more complex issues.

Priorities for 2026 to 2029

- The relevant Best Start in Life branding will be adopted on all our sites by September 2026 as per DfE requirements.
- We will expand our Stay and Play offer to give more sessions in areas where deprivation is higher and GLD outcomes are lowest so that we can support children with development of their skills before starting primary school.
- We will increase our outreach work across areas with the highest deprivation to ensure we meet with families who need support the most.
- As mentioned in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030, we will be embedding housing advice and support through a Housing Officer in all Best Start Family Hubs.
- We will progress gaining access to birth data from health colleagues so that new parents/carers can be provided with Best Start Family Hubs information as soon as possible
- We will continue to monitor performance to ensure that we are attracting families into our Best Start Family Hubs who need the most support.

8.2 Supporting families with Early Language and Home Learning

8.2.1 Achievements so far

Early language acquisition impacts on all aspects of babies' and young children's non-physical development. It contributes to their ability to manage emotions and communicate feelings, to establish and maintain relationships, to think symbolically, and to learn to read and write.³ Home Learning Environment (HLE) covers the interactions parents have in and around the home with their children from birth. The quality of the HLE is a key predictor of a baby's and child's early language ability and future success. Disadvantaged children are less likely to experience a high-quality HLE, a factor exacerbated during the pandemic.

In 2022 the Council and Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust established the Best Start in Speech Language and Communication Board, with a purpose to oversee the co-ordination and delivery of a system-wide approach to supporting speech, language and communication in the early years.

This Board oversees a multi-agency Delivery Plan which aims to:

Improve the communication, language and literacy skills of children aged 0-5 in Lewisham, through joined-up and evidenced-based approach that begins from the point of conception onwards.

³ Law, J., Charlton, J., & Asmussen, K. (2017). Language as a child wellbeing indicator. Early Intervention Foundation. www.researchgate.net/publication/330292437_Language_as_a_child_wellbeing_indicator

The aims of the Delivery Plan are to achieve:

1. High-quality universal spaces

Adopt a system-wide and whole-community approach that ensures that all universal spaces in Lewisham provide environments that actively support communication and are aligned in their messaging on early language and communication development.

2. Targeted support

Reduce inequalities in early language and communication development through more inclusive services, better community engagement, and clearer targeting of support, to that reach families less likely to engage with formal or traditional services.

3. Workforce collaboration, capacity and capability

Improve workforce capacity and capability with an aim to enable the system-wide and whole-community approach across agencies and ensure support provided to families is high quality.

4. Engagement with parents and carers

Increase access to support for families using a range of different methods, with the aim of ensuring that parents and carers feel supported on how to provide an enriching home learning environment and have more language-rich interactions with their children.

What data is telling us

To meet these aims, over the last three years the Lewisham partnership has:

- Developed the Moments that Matter campaign with local parents to raise awareness of simple ways to improve early language and home learning.
- Provided training, coaching and support from Speech and Language Therapists for Early Years settings, including for childminders. *128 practitioners attended training, attended Lunch and Learn sessions, and 93 observation visits were completed.*
- Created a Speech, Language and Communication Toolkit in partnership with Early Years settings to ensure 'communication *friendly* environments' for children.
- Delivered the Raising Early Attainment in Literacy (REAL) programme with children and parents. *132 families were supported via Sharing REAL group programmes, with 100% of parents showing increased knowledge, confidence and skills.*
- Trained staff across early years services in core messaging and approaches to use when supporting parents to improve the home learning environment. *96 staff were trained in the introductory REAL and SLC training across 23 different professional groups, with 100% of practitioners reporting an increase in knowledge, confidence and skills.*
- Established multi-disciplinary delivery of the REAL programme led in partnership by Early Years officers, Family Hubs staff, Speech and Language Therapists, Libraries staff and Health Visiting staff. *27 staff have been trained.*
- Developed a pathway for practitioners across services to support them to give advice, guidance and signposting to parents.
- Provided the EasyPeasy Parenting Support App with focus on positive home-learning environment and improved level of development. *794 parents have signed up so far, reaching 1,524 children.*

8.2.3 Priorities for 2026 to 2029

Following review and evaluation of progress to date, in February 2026 the Best Start in Speech Language and Communication Board agreed a new set of objectives to be achieved over the next three years to continue to delivery improvements in these areas:

Priorities

High-quality universal spaces

- Ensuring all services and spaces provide 'Communication Friendly Environments' for children.
- Ensuring all services that come into contact with families are using core messaging on improving early speech, language and communication (Moments that Matter and REAL).

Targeted support

- Increasing outreach in the community, with a focus on the Downham and Grove Park areas.
- Improve reach to children of specific ethnic groups that are achieving lower levels of development in Reception.
- Improving support for families with English as an Additional Language, to boost parental confidence and reduce barriers to access.
- Ensuring targeted delivery of the REAL programme in Early Years settings and via home-visiting approaches.
- Improving support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Workforce Collaboration, capacity and capability

- Improving coordination of offer across all early years services, strengthening links between Family Hubs, Libraries, Early Years Settings and Schools
- Providing additional staff capacity to coordinate and connect EL work together across EY Settings, Family Hubs and Libraries, as well as via directly support parents.
- Delivering a package of training coaching and support for staff across all EY settings led by Speech and Language Therapists

Engagement with parents and carers

- Increasing provision of Stay and Play sessions as informal and accessible spaces to promote Early Language development.
- Running community events to celebrate National Year of Reading.
- Increasing opportunities for reading.
- Improving quality of early identification and intervention
- Encouraging parents to be champions of Early Language and Home Learning
- Improving visibility and quality of online information
- Increasing the number of parents accessing the REAL group parenting programmes

8.3 Support with age 0-5 parenting

8.3.1 Aims and objectives

Our intention is to carry out an extensive mapping exercise to establish what pre-birth – age 5 parenting provision is available across Lewisham. This will go beyond that offered by the local authority and commissioned services, to include that offered by the VCSE sector and education settings.

Lewisham's Family Hubs service already have an extensive parenting offer, including dedicated staff and volunteers. We will look at what is working well, where the gaps are and how we can get best value for money.

It is important that any offer is co-produced with families. We will carry out consultations with families to help shape the best universal parenting offer for them.

Our approach is that parenting programmes and sessions offered within Family Hubs should be universal, to reduce any stigma. We recognise that parenting is more than courses, but anything that can support parents and carers to raise their confidence in parenting their children – this includes Stay & Play sessions, ESOL, and more.

We will use all of this information to identify gaps in provision, both geographically and subject matter, in order to pull together a cohesive, comprehensive plan to address these gaps.

8.3.2 Achievements and data so far

- Recruitment of additional Senior Parenting Practitioner to improve capacity and support delivery of Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC) and Reducing Parental Conflict programmes.
- Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC) peer-led parenting courses have been delivered, and local parent group leader volunteers have been recruited and trained to deliver EPEC. *So far this financial year, 16 parents completed the programme.*
- Fathers' Programmes e.g. one-to-one outreach support, antenatal education, stay and play sessions for fathers. *So far this financial year, 15 fathers have attended.*
- Infant massage classes offered. *So far this financial year, 132 babies have attended.*
- Owl Babies. *So far this financial year, 47 children have attended.*
- Baby Stay and Play and Baby Messy Play. *So far 3852 individuals have attended.*
- Explorers Plus. *So far this financial year, 561 children have attended.*
- Stay and Play. *So far this financial year, 1919 children have attended.*
- Baby Messy Play. *So far this financial year, 619 babies have attended.*
- Established a home-based parenting support programme delivered by local parent volunteers. Between April 2024 when the service began, and December 2025, 68 families with 138 children have accessed support, and 53 parent volunteers have been trained.

8.3.3 Priorities for 2026 to 2029

We will continue to deliver our parenting offer through Family Hubs to support our parents and carers in giving their children the best start in life, focusing on:

Priorities

Programmes and interventions

- Design and embed the ante-natal parenting offer within the Family Hubs context.
- Expand the fathers and male carers offer across Family Hubs. This will involve the recruitment of a Senior Fathers and Male Carers Practitioner, which will be a vehicle to coordinate interventions and workforce development functions (such as Communities of Practice).
- Continue to provide home-based parenting support delivered by local parent volunteers.
- Expand the EPEC programme to include additional modules (courses) in Autism and ADHD.
- Implement the Parents as Partners Programme within the Reducing Parental Conflict space.

Developing the Local System

- Undertake a comprehensive mapping exercise of the parenting provision available across the borough, in order to identify gaps and formulate plans to address these.
- Design and develop a plan for how the funding can be used to develop a transformative offer for the next 3 years through the development of a Parenting Steering Group.
- Develop a strong ante-natal unified offer within the Family Hubs context to reach parents, carers and birthing people at the earliest opportunity.

8.4 Supporting families with their Perinatal Mental Health and Parent-Infant Relationships

8.4.1 Aims and objectives

National research shows that perinatal mental health problems affect up to 26% of women during pregnancy and the first year after having a baby. A significant minority of women are affected by mild-moderate mental health problems, including anxiety disorders (13%) and depression (12%). If these numbers are applied to the Lewisham birth rate, this equates to approximately 523 women per year affected by anxiety disorders in the perinatal period, and 482 women affected by depression.

A parent's ability to bond with and care for their baby, their parenting style, and the development of a positive relationship, can predict several physical, social, emotional and cognitive outcomes through to adulthood. International research shows that most babies (55-60%) will have a secure relationship with a sensitive and nurturing adult, giving them a strong foundation to develop physically and mentally. However, as a relatively deprived area, modelling estimates that Lewisham can expect:

- 26-32% of babies (up to 1287 per year in Lewisham) to have insecure attachment relationships with their primary caregiver
- 16% of babies (644 per year in Lewisham) will have a disorganised attachment relationship with their primary caregiver. Research shows that this percentage will be significantly higher where trauma and adversity occur. For example, up to 80% of Children Looked After have a disorganised attachment.

In 2023, the Council brought together a range of stakeholders to form a multi-agency Perinatal Mental Health and Parent-Infant Relationship Steering Group, which would focus on improving access to support for parental emotional wellbeing and encouraging healthy parent-infant relationships in the perinatal period.

The purpose of this Steering Group is to develop local aims and objectives, review progress of the programme, and evaluate impact. Membership of the group includes representatives of; Maternity Services (LGT), Perinatal Mental Health Services (SLaM), CAMHS (SLaM), Health Visiting (LGT), Public Health (LBL), Family Hubs (LBL), Children's Services (LBL) and voluntary and community organisations (SEL Mind, Home-Start, Future Men).

The Steering Group oversees a multi-agency Delivery Plan which has four aims:

- **Programmes and interventions for Perinatal Mental Health:** Increase support to parents and carers that promotes positive perinatal emotional wellbeing and addresses mild perinatal mental health difficulties, including for fathers and male caregivers.
- **Programmes and interventions for Parent-Infant Relationships:** Increase support to parents and carers that encourages healthy parent-infant relationships and address any low-level difficulties, including for fathers and male caregivers.
- **Training and workforce development:** Ensure that all services interacting with parents in the perinatal period have the skills, resources and capacity to support parents in these two areas.
- **Developing the local system:** Ensure a multi-agency and whole-system approach to supporting parents in these two areas.

8.4.2 Achievements and data so far

To meet these aims, over the last three years the Lewisham partnership has:

- Established Lewisham PAIRS (Parent and Infant Relationship Service). PAIRS provides access to assessment and a range of interventions in relation to parent-infant relationships and is a fully integrated service led by Health Visiting and CAMHS, supported by multi-agency practitioners from across Lewisham. *280 referrals have been sent to PAIRS over the last 9 months.*
- Established a new Parent-Infant Psychotherapy offer for 0-3 year-olds within Lewisham CAMHS. *21 parents and 22 babies have received treatment.*
- Expanded the size and diversified the delivery of our Perinatal Mental Health peer Support Programmes. *708 parents received support in the last two years, 159 of which were male carers, and 127 of which were mothers from ethnically diverse communities.*
- Established the Triple P for Baby programme, and coordinated multi-agency delivery of the programme by staff from Family Thrive, Family Hubs and Children's Social Care. *102 families have received support to date.*
- Established an offer of Video Interaction Guidance which has been delivered to *19 families*
- Increased capacity of the Solihull Postnatal Parenting Plus programme. *77 families have received support to date*
- Established a Specialist Health Visitor for Parent-Infant Mental Health, providing more in-depth assessment and clinical interventions on a one-to-one basis. *85 families have been supported to date.*
- Established a Maternal Journal group for women with perinatal mental health needs. *92 women have been supported to date.*
- Provided training on Perinatal Mental Health and Parent-Infant Relationships for Family Hubs staff and the wider early years workforce. *176 professionals have attended this from 11 different professions, including 48 Social Workers trained in infant observation.*



8.4.3 Priorities for 2026 to 2029

Following review and evaluation of progress to date, the Perinatal Mental Health and Parent-Infant Relationship Steering Group agreed a new set of objectives to be achieved over the next three years:

Priorities

Programmes and interventions for Perinatal Mental Health

- Establish group programmes focused on reducing anxiety, isolation and loneliness in pregnancy and the immediate postnatal period
- Establish and test a new perinatal counselling offer
- Establish and test a new home-visiting peer support offer
- Improve quality and visibility of online information to support perinatal mental health
- Continue delivery of peer support programmes for perinatal mental health, including support for male caregivers and for parents from ethnically diverse groups.
- Continue delivery of antenatal midwifery-led advice clinic for perinatal mental health.

Programmes and interventions for Parent-Infant Relationships

- Expand capacity of Lewisham PAIRS, in order to allow more parents and babies to access support and ensure sustainability of the service.
- Increase access to support in the antenatal period, including through increasing capacity and ensuring sustainable delivery of the Solihull Approach Antenatal Programme.
- Continue delivery of a range of parent-infant relationship interventions, including the Solihull Approach, Video Interaction Guidance, Triple P for Baby and Circle of Security.
- Improve quality and visibility of online information to support parent-infant relationships.

Training and Workforce Development

- Train additional multi-disciplinary staff to deliver a range of parent-infant relationship interventions, including the Solihull Approach, Video Interaction Guidance, Triple P for Baby and Circle of Security.
- Increase uptake of parent-infant relationship and infant mental health consultation and advice offer for staff across the partnership.
- Provide training for partner agencies to raise awareness and educate on identify concerns with parent-infant relationship and infant mental health.

8.5 Supporting families with Infant Feeding

8.5.1 Aims and objectives

Breastfeeding offers broad and long-lasting benefits to population health, contributing to improved life chances and well-being. Human milk provides unique properties that support healthy development and reduce the risk of infectious diseases, malnutrition, and chronic conditions for infants. Additionally, breastfeeding

benefits maternal health by reducing the risk of chronic diseases like cancer and diabetes. The evidence highlights benefits in terms of improved parent-infant relationships.

In 2023 the Lewisham Infant Feeding Steering Group was established to oversee our partnership work on infant feeding. This includes representation from Public Health, Health Visiting, Maternity Services, Family Hubs, Maternity Voices Partnership, and Commissioning.

This Infant Feeding Steering Group established a multi-agency Infant Feeding Delivery Plan which aims to:

Offer women and birthing people, families and carers consistent, evidence-based, and timely support for infant feeding

The objectives of the Delivery Plan are to ensure that:

- All parents and carers have the **information, practical advice and support** they need to support breastfeeding initiation and continuation, expressing breastmilk, and/or formula feeding where appropriate
- Those **least likely to access services** are engaged as early as possible to help them understand the benefits of breastfeeding and responsive skin-to-skin feeding, and how to access the support available to them, helping to reduce inequalities.
- **Timely, high-quality, one-to-one infant-feeding support** is available in the critical post-birth period
- Parents have opportunities to meet other parents and access **peer-to-peer support**.
- All Lewisham maternity and early years staff receive **appropriate, accredited training** to ensure infant feeding advice is accurate, helpful and consistent, and culturally sensitive
- **Care and referral pathways** are consistent, equitable and co-ordinated across maternity and early years services

Compared to nationally and regionally, Lewisham sees high rates of babies breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks post-birth. Whilst this is positive, these rates potentially mask inequalities in experience, access and outcomes for parents from different backgrounds. Through our Delivery Plan we want to uncover any inequalities and ensure that we target those parents that may struggle to start or maintain breastfeeding, or may choose not to breastfeed, to ensure equity of outcomes for all babies and their parents.

8.5.2 Achievements and data so far

To meet the aims and objectives set out above, over the last three years the Lewisham partnership has:

- Established a service providing peer support for parents to help them start and continue breastfeeding. *Between 1 July 2023 and 31 December 2025, the service has supported 1,870 parents.*
- Recruited local parents as volunteer peer supporters. *Between 1 July 2023 and 31 December 2025, 102 local parents have been trained as volunteers.*
- Established a new Health Visitor-led specialist infant feeding clinic for babies with more complex feeding issues. *Between 1 July 2023 and 31 December 2025, the clinic has supported 261 babies.*
- Established an Emergency Infant Formula Milk Pathway, providing formula and feeding advice to parents that are unable to afford this. *Between 1 July 2023 and 31 December 2025, 22 parents have accessed support.*
- Delivered 'Tongue-Tie Awareness' training to midwives, health visitors and peer supporters. *Between 1 July 2023 and 31 December 2025, 115 professionals have accessed training.*
- Ensured that all Family Hubs sites are breastfeeding friendly
- Expanded delivery of the HENRY Healthy Families programme and workshops
- Increased the provision of information and education on infant feeding in the antenatal period
- Increased the capacity of Health Visiting Infant Feeding Hubs across the borough
- Contributed to development of a south east London Infant Feeding Strategy



8.5.3 Priorities for 2026 to 2029

Following review and evaluation of progress to date, the Infant Feeding Steering Group agreed a new set of objectives to be achieved over the next three years:

Priorities

Programmes and interventions

- Establish new Lactation Consultant drop-in sessions across maternity and health visiting services, providing specialist breastfeeding support free of charge.
- Establish a new loan scheme for breast pumps.
- Increase parent attendance at Infant Feeding Antenatal Education sessions.
- Increase provision of peer support for parents at home and in community Infant Feeding Hubs.
- Provide more targeted support to young parents.
- Provide infant feeding guidance and materials as part of Baby Box Scheme.

Training and workforce development

- Increase specialist infant feeding capacity within the Community Midwifery Service, including to provide additional Infant Feeding Hubs.
- Improve staff training, guidance and documentation of infant feeding within the Maternity Service.
- Provide further advanced-level training to a group of multi-disciplinary staff to allow them to support parents at a more specialist level.
- Provide more practical training for staff following their initial Breastfeeding Initiative Training.
- Provide further infant feeding training for Family Hubs staff.

Developing the Local System

- Establish a single point of contact for Infant Feeding Support in Lewisham, across maternity, health visiting and peer support services.
- Develop a system-wide Infant Feeding pathway document for parents and professionals, detailing services available and how to access them.
- Establish a Breastfeeding Welcome Scheme ensuring that business across Lewisham are welcoming and supportive places for parents to breastfeed.
- Produce videos promoting Lewisham as a Breastfeeding Welcome borough.

8.6 Best Start Digital Services



8.6.1 Achievements so far

Digital support can be found on the Family Hubs website [The Hub@Lewisham - HOME](#), which contains advice and information for parents and carers on the stages of their child's life, or they can ask questions of our virtual Family Navigator, Vanya.

They can also access the free EasyPeasy App which gives parenting tips and activities for families with their 0–5-year-olds.

8.6.2 What data is telling us

- Our Family Hubs website has generated over 56,000 page views
- Number of questions asked of Vanya – data to follow
- 794 parents have signed up to Easy Peasy so far, reaching 1,524 children.

8.6.3 Priorities for 2026 to 2029

Priorities

- Continue to expand the Family Hubs website to provide information to support families, directing families to other websites that can support specific areas.
- Support the launch of the new national Best Start digital service, linked to 'My Children' on the NHS app, bringing together advice and guidance all parents need in one place and linking families to their local services.

9. Early Education and Childcare

9.1 More stable and sufficient early years funding, including the promotion of inclusion through increase in Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)

Lewisham is strengthening the stability, inclusivity and sustainability of its early years system through improved funding oversight, targeted support for disadvantaged children, and a more strategic approach to sufficiency and quality.

9.1.1 Achievements so far

- Introduced a more stable early years funding model that supports provider sustainability and promotes inclusion through more effective use of the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) allocation and EYPP.
- Strengthened market oversight to ensure funding reaches settings supporting the highest levels of need, particularly in areas of deprivation.
- Improved monitoring systems that connect sufficiency, quality and funding, enabling evidence-based decision making and early intervention.

9.1.2 What data is telling us

- Funding pressures are greatest in areas of deprivation, where SENIF applications are significantly higher.
- Workforce shortages and fluctuating demand mean some providers continue to require sustainability support.
- EYPP uptake remains inconsistent, signalling an opportunity to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children by increasing and targeting takeup.

9.1.3 Priorities for 26/29

Priorities

- Strengthen sufficiency planning to ensure investment is focused on improving outcomes for disadvantaged children.
- Increase EYPP take up and monitor its impact on early language, communication and early literacy outcomes.
- Use SENIF oversight to ensure targeted funding is used appropriately to supplement, not replace, Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP), supported by coaching and training for settings where required.

9.2 Delivery of 30 hours government funded childcare

Lewisham has successfully implemented the expanded entitlement offer, maintaining quality and prioritising inclusion, but must now increase take up – particularly among disadvantaged families – to ensure equity of access and improved outcomes.

9.2.1 Achievements so far

- Successfully delivered the expanded 30 hours offer, ensuring sufficient places for working families and supporting parental employment, with families projected to save an average of £7,500 per year.
- Maintained a strong quality profile: 97% of early years settings in Lewisham are rated Good or Outstanding.
- Strengthened inclusion through targeted SENIF: 52% of applications come from the three most deprived wards, demonstrating effective early identification and support.

9.2.2 What data is telling us

- Take up of the universal Early Years Entitlement (3–4 years) and Early Learning for 2-year-olds (EL2) remains below the national average, indicating a need for strengthened outreach and clearer family information.
- The DfE's minimum expected take up for eligible two-year-olds is 72.7%, establishing a clear target for local improvement.
- Local vacancy data shows overall sufficiency but notable ward level variation, especially for under 2s and in areas of deprivation.

9.2.3 Priorities for 2026 to 2029

Priorities

- Increase take up across all entitlements, particularly among disadvantaged families, children with SEND and low income working households.
- Expand places in areas of greatest need by shaping local markets, addressing childcare deserts and supporting providers to offer funded only places.
- Strengthen family engagement through Family Information Service (FIS) outreach, Parent Champions, Family Hubs activity and integrated referral pathways.

9.3 Improving the quality of education in early years settings, childminders and reception classes

Lewisham is raising quality through strengthened moderation, targeted workforce development, inclusive practice, and focused early intervention – supporting improved outcomes and reducing inequalities for the most vulnerable children.

9.3.1 Achievements so far

- Delivered Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) professional dialogue and good practice sessions to ensure Early Learning Goals (ELG) judgements are aligned with expectations, strengthen high quality Reception practice, and support professional networking.
- 20 schools/settings participating in the Maths Champions programme, improving practitioner confidence in early mathematics.
- 10 settings working with the London South Stronger Practice Hub on babies and early communication, strengthening early language development.
- Improved Progress Check at Age 2 processes, supporting earlier identification and stronger links with parents through enhanced Home Learning Environment (HLE) guidance.
- Delivered targeted OAP visits, supporting the most vulnerable children through early identification, timely referral and improved practice in Communication and Language (C&L) and Personal, Social, Emotional Development (PSED).
- Strengthened SENIF oversight to ensure targeted use of funding and appropriate follow up coaching, training and monitoring.
- Maintained strong sector wide focus on inclusion and early language through provider networks.
- Continued biannual delivery of the national Early Years SENCO qualification, expanding specialist capacity across the workforce.

9.3.2 What data is telling us

- Government ambition: 75% of children achieving GLD by 2028; Lewisham targets: 80% overall, 64.8% FSM.
- GLD outcomes have fluctuated between 68.2-71.3% (2022-2025), with reading and writing below 80% in most years.
- In 2025, 80% of the five-year-olds reached GLD in 22% of Lewisham Schools; Area 3 schools and schools in the most deprived wards remain priority areas.
- Gaps persist for boys, children from ethnically diverse backgrounds and children with SEND requiring targeted action.

9.3.3. Priorities for 2026 to 2029

Priorities

- Continue annual quality visits to identify gaps and provide targeted improvement tools and guidance.
- Improve the quality and consistency of Progress Check at Age 2, strengthening links with Health Visiting checks (currently 69.48% completed).
- Roll out Step Into School digital profiles to enhance transition information for Reception teachers.
- Maintain and expand Maths Champions participation.
- Deliver and grow the virtual training library of 30+ specialist modules, including Supporting SEND in Early Years, led by multiagency professionals.
- Provide targeted advisory and SEND specialist teaching support for schools in deprivation hotspots.
- Strengthen early language pathways and transitions through integrated Family Hubs working.

10. Strengthening Health Services

10.1 Strengthening Health Visiting Services

10.1.1. Achievements so far

Lewisham Health Visiting service has delivered significant progress over the past year, strengthening early support for families and ensuring more children get the best start in life.

The expansion of Baby Hubs across the borough has created welcoming, accessible community spaces where families can receive timely advice, developmental support, and peer connection. Attendance has increased markedly, demonstrating growing trust and engagement from parents and carers. Alongside this, targeted infant feeding support and enhanced follow up by specialist health visiting and midwifery colleagues have contributed to continued improved breastfeeding rates, reflecting the impact of evidence based practice and consistent health promoting messaging. These achievements highlight the pivotal role of Health Visiting in prevention, early identification, and optimising outcomes in the crucial early years.

10.1.2 What data is telling us

Lewisham's performance is strong compared to England in the following areas:

- Fewer premature births
- More new birth visits within 14 days
- More breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks
- Few infant admissions under 14 days (0-4)
- Few emergency admissions (0-4)
- More children at a healthy weight at age 4-5

Of the children assessed for their 2-to-2.5-year health and development review in June 25, 87.13% were at or above the expected level in all 5 domains of development – communication (88.69%), gross motor skills (98.09%), fine motor skills (91.91%), problem-solving skills (97.73%) and personal-social skills (95.65%).

However, only 69.48% of children were assessed (583 out of 839 children offered) highlighting that over 30% of children are not receiving a health and development review. A task and finish group has been established which has looked at actions to be taken to increase the number of completed reviews.

10.1.3 Priorities for 2026 to 2029

Priority

- A more detailed review of the children who have not completed a 2-2.5-year-olds health and development check will be carried out to understand areas that need to be targeted to ensure the number of children receiving the check increases.

10.2 Increasing access to vaccinations

10.2.1 Achievements so far

Lewisham has among the highest MMR vaccination rates in London. Lewisham and other Southeast London boroughs increased MMR vaccine uptake by adopting a local vaccine schedule that moved the timing of the second vaccination MMR vaccination from 3y4mo to 18mo – this change was so successful that it has now been adopted as national policy.

10.2.2 What data is telling us

Lewisham does not have the level of vaccine coverage (91%) required to prevent the spread of measles in the population. As of Q2 2025/26, the proportion of children who had had one dose of MMR by age 2y was 84% (compared to 80% in London and 88% in England), and the proportion who had had two doses of MMR by age 5y was 74% (compared to 69% in London and 84% in England).

Local data indicates uptake of MMR is higher in White and Asian children and lower in Black children, and that there are lower rates of uptake in the highest deprivation quintile.

10.2.3 Priorities for 2026 to 2029

Priorities

- To increase the proportion of children receiving their MMR(V) vaccine on schedule, including working with school-aged immunisation provider and Lewisham schools.
- Reduce inequalities in vaccine uptake to ensure all groups benefit from the vaccine.



10.3 Reducing tooth decay in children

10.3.1 Achievements so far

Lewisham Public Health commissions local support for supervised toothbrushing in early years settings. As of March 2026, 30 early years settings have participated in the programme and staff have received training to implement supervised toothbrushing. A total of 1,100 children aged 3–5 years are now brushing their teeth daily within their education settings as part of the programme. In addition, each child has received a takehome oral health promotion pack, which includes ageappropriate toothpaste and a toothbrush to support continued brushing at home.

Lewisham has among the lowest rates of visible dental decay in five-year-olds in London.

10.3.2 What data is telling us

Lewisham has consistently lower dental decay rates in children than London and England. In 2023/24, 19% of five-year-olds had visually obvious dental decay (compared to 27% in London and 22% in England).

Lewisham has consistently higher hospital admissions for dental caries in 0–5-year-olds than London and England. In the combined three-year period 2021/22–23/24, 341 in 100,000 0–5-year-olds were admitted to hospital with dental caries (compared to 290 in London and 207 in England).

Low overall rates of dental decay but higher rates of hospital admissions may indicate issues in access to appropriate dental care. At a national level, this is known to increase health inequalities for Black children.

10.3.3 Priorities for 2026 to 2029

Priorities

- Promote oral health in early years through supervised toothbrushing, oral health packs and early nutrition to reduce dental decay.
- Reduce hospital admissions for dental caries and inequalities in hospital admissions.



Appendix 1 – links to other strategies

The Best Start Local Plan and its priorities have close links to the following strategies:

Prevention and Family Advice Strategy

The Prevention and Family Advice Strategy is being developed to set out how Lewisham supports families as early as possible, helping them get the right help at the right time. It will explain the support available locally, how services work together, and how professionals across the partnership can respond in a joined up way. The aim is to help families before challenges escalate, reducing the need for more intensive support later on.

Families First for Children

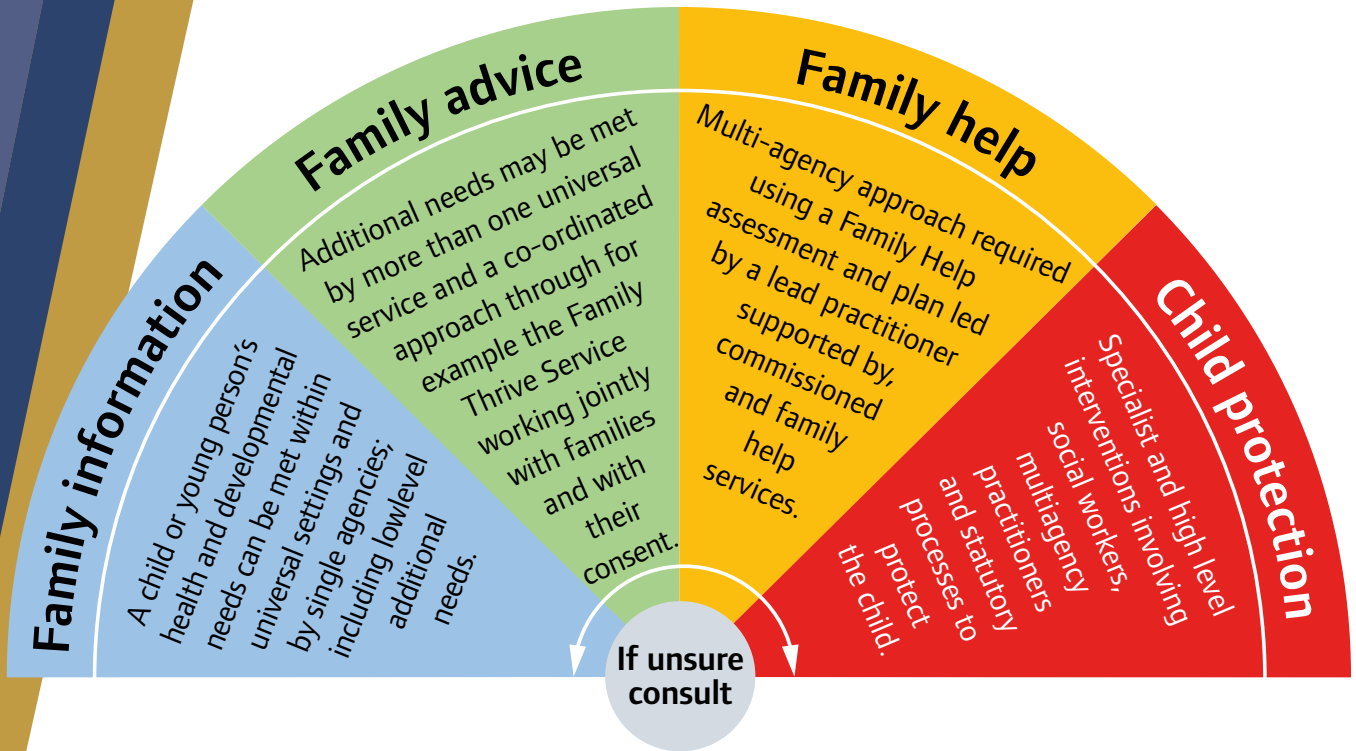
In November 2024, the Department for Education published Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive, setting out major reforms to the national children's social care system, including the national rollout of Family Help and MultiAgency Child Protection Teams from April 2026. Lewisham was one of ten Wave 2 Pathfinder local authorities testing these reforms, resulting in significant changes to local practice.

A key development has been transforming the MultiAgency Safeguarding Hub into the Families First Contact Point (FFCP), creating a more integrated and responsive "front door" to children's services. Alongside this, Lewisham established Family Help Teams, bringing together targeted early help and child in need services.

Lewisham has also strengthened its use of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM), ensuring families and their wider networks are central to planning, decisionmaking and shaping solutions. In addition, a Pathfinder School Cluster was created across five schools to improve earlier intervention and provides rapid access to multiagency professionals – such as CAMHS, educational psychologists and therapists.

Each cluster school hosts a Family Navigator one day per week, connecting families to their local Family Hub and wider support. The Family Thrive Service has also been remodelled with clearer referral criteria aligned to the revised Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership Continuum of Need below. It now provides shortterm, coordinated, multiagency interventions – typically up to 12 weeks – for families requiring extra help before issues escalate.

Continuum of needs



Education Strategy 2022-2027



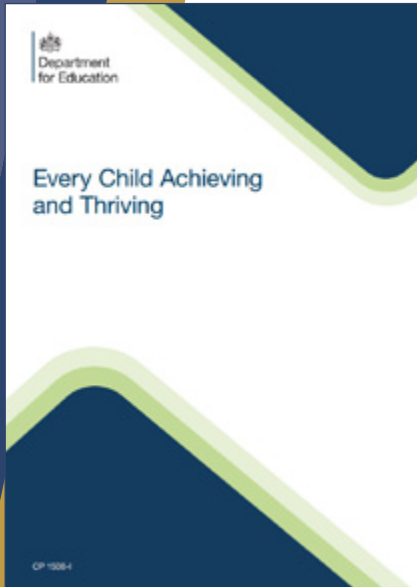
Education Strategy 2022-27

In Lewisham we have high aspirations for all our children and young people, whatever their starting point. We want all children and young people to have access to excellent education in Lewisham, so they can fulfil their true potential. We want them to have quality learning pathways from early childhood to adulthood which enable them to thrive and develop the life skills they will need.

Lewisham Council – Education strategy

The Strategy's priorities align to the Best Start Local Plan as follows:

- Priority 1 - A place in a good school/setting for all our children and young people – this will ensure that there is 'sufficient early years education through strategic planning and support to the local childcare market and quality of provision.'
- Priority 2 - Supporting all our children and young people to reach their potential and be ready for their future – ensuring high take up of Early Years government funded places for eligible 2, 3 and 4 years olds and continuing to build on the Early Years partnerships to support home learning; personal, social and emotional, communication and physical development (Healthy Early Years, Making it Real early language programme).
- Priority 3 – embedding a culture of inclusion and equity – continue to work with schools and settings to address the attainment gap for identified groups of children and young people.
- Priority 4 – collaborative school improvement to raise standards and meet priorities – continue to focus school/setting improvement activity on teaching and learning; exciting, relevant curricula; inclusion and narrowing the attainment gap between identified groups of pupils and their peers.
- Priority 5 - Supporting the physical and emotional health and wellbeing of all children and young people – maximise opportunities to support parents and families in their role of bringing up their children.



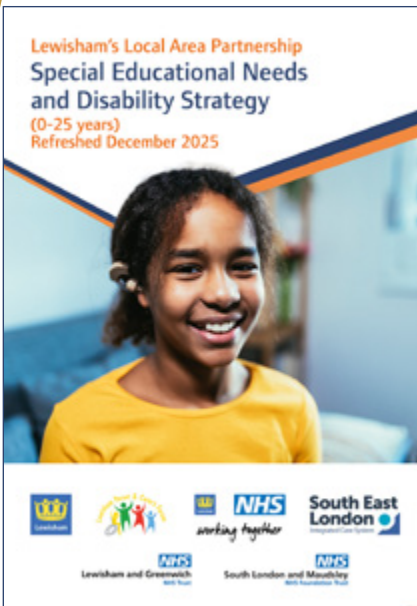
The Department for Education's white paper

The Department for Education's white paper published in February 2026, 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' outlines the government's vision for childhood and for schools and includes:

- The education and experiences that we provided to the children of today will shape the society of tomorrow.
- It all begins with family – a desire for all children to have a happy and fulfilling childhood and a strong, stable, loving home
- Our children have the strongest foundations when love and support at home is built on with stretching, enriching and inclusion school experiences.

Every child achieving and thriving - GOV.UK

This strategy includes the target for 'a record proportion of children starting school ready to learn – 75% of 5-year-olds reaching a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage.' This also includes strengthening the partnership between nurseries and schools.



SEND Partnership Strategy 2025-2030

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy reflects our commitment to continuous improvement and responsiveness to the needs of our children and young people with SEND and their families here in Lewisham.

Lewisham Council – Our SEND Partnership Strategy 2025-2030

Its priorities are: -

Priority 1 – children and young people with SEND are supported to build healthy, happy lives within their community; prepare for adulthood; and experience smooth and timely transitions, appropriate to their needs

Priority 2 - Parents/carers and our children and young people with SEND are recognised as experts by experience and their views and voices shape our services, planning and service delivery.

Priority 3 – the partnership workforce has the knowledge and skills to effectively support children and young adults with diverse SEND profiles.

Priority 4 – the partnership ensures early/timely identification, assessment and effective planning to meet needs through inclusive practice.

Priority 5 – information is shared effectively and there is good communication with CYP and their families.



Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Lewisham’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2030 aims to improve the health and wellbeing of all Lewisham residents and reduce existing health inequalities by taking partnership action on prevention and priority social determinants of health for the borough.

Lewisham Council - Health and wellbeing strategy

The strategy identifies four priority areas for action over the next five years. These are:

- Taking action to address the impact of poverty on health and wellbeing.
- Taking action to address the impact of housing on health and wellbeing.
- Taking action to embed prevention for children and young people in educational settings.
- Taking action to progress key prevention programmes within the borough, with a focus on embedding cancer and cardiovascular disease prevention across the Lewisham’s health and adult social care system.



South East London Integrated Care Strategic Priorities for 2023-2028

Integrated Care Strategic Priorities for 2023-28

The South East London Integrated Care System’s priority areas for Lewisham are aligned with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and are: -

- To strengthen the integration of primary and community-based care
- To build stronger, healthier families and provide families with integrated, high, quality, whole family support services.
- To address inequalities throughout Lewisham’s health and care system and tackle impact on health and care outcomes.
- To maximise our role as ‘anchor organisations’ and employers

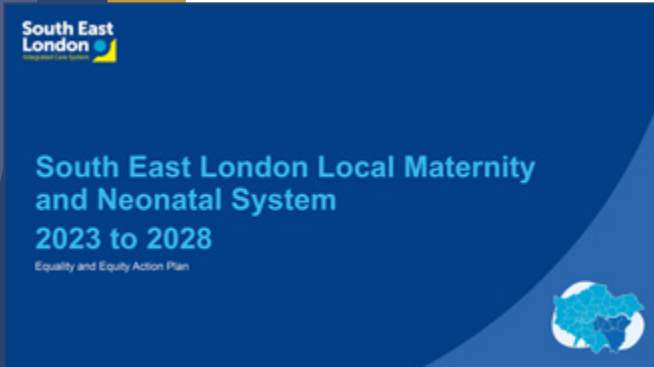
Integrated Neighbourhood Teams

The South East London Children and Young People Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INT) are local, multi agency teams designed to deliver coordinated, proactive, and timely support to children, young people, and their families. They bring together professionals from health, mental health, social care, education, and the voluntary/ community sector to provide joined up care at neighbourhood level.

The Integrated Care Board and partners have developed a framework for INTs which builds on the good work already underway such as the development of Family Hubs, Child Health Teams and the shift to Family Care and Support in social care.

The Framework describes a way of working at neighbourhood that will help to optimise these existing (and emerging) developments and comprises 10 key functions or delivery components:

1. Population health management (data, intel and action)
2. Active identification and family-centred early intervention
3. Universal health and care provision
4. Multi-agency coordination and working
5. Direct care delivery
6. Managing escalations, urgent or unexpected needs
7. Longitudinal care and transition at 18+
8. 'Flourish', ongoing support and optimising potential
9. 'Waiting well' or 'unwell'
10. Engaging VCSE as trusted delivery partners



SEL Maternity and Neonatal system – 2023 to 2028

The South East London Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS) recognised there is inequity in the provision and outcomes of maternity care. This means that some women and birthing people including Black, Asian and ethnically diverse groups, those living in deprivation, and people with other protected characteristics experience poorer maternity outcomes compared to their white counterparts or those from the most socially advantaged groups.

This can also be applied to the maternity workforce with a recognised lack of diversity within the most senior positions and potential inequity in the opportunities available for career development. Increasing equity across the system is a priority for the SEL LMNS and this equality and equity action plan sets out the key deliverables from NHS England guidance and local needs and actions that we will take to address these issues. This is a high-level action plan that will be updated as key areas of work progress. A significant period will be required in order to achieve and embed all the act

South East London Local Maternity and Neonatal System - 2023 to 2028