

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Children and Young People Scrutiny

DATE: 12th March 2026

SUBJECT: Best Start Plan

REPORT FROM: Rachel Davis Public Health Specialist (Start Well)

Collette Radcliffe Service Manager Children and Young People

1.0 BACKGROUND

Bury is committed to ensuring that every baby, child and family has the best possible start in life, with a strong focus on reducing inequalities and improving outcomes from conception to age five. This vision is informed by a detailed understanding of local need, including population change, developmental outcomes, service access patterns and community insight.

National guidance published in July 2025 sets out strengthened expectations for early years development, including targets for local authorities to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes. For Bury, the target is 74% achieving GLD overall and 57.7% for children eligible for free school meals (FSM). Current levels are 65.2% overall and 50.9% for FSM children, meaning approximately 183 additional children overall, and 18 FSM children, would need to achieve GLD (based on 2025 cohort data).

Local data shows variation in GLD outcomes across wards and between early education providers, as well as lower take-up of early learning entitlements and inconsistent attendance at the 2–2½-year Healthy Child Programme review in some neighbourhoods. Priority groups include summer-born children, children with SEND, multilingual families, and those experiencing disadvantage.

Bury's GLD Action Plan, Family Hubs Delivery Plan and wider Best Start approach bring together health, early education, schools, VCSE organisations and community partners to build an integrated early years system. Delivery is organised across Bury's five neighbourhoods through Family Hubs, Children's Centres and trusted community spaces, with interventions focused on early identification, speech and language, parenting, the home learning environment, and targeted support for children on the cusp of achieving GLD.

2.0 ISSUES

A number of challenges shape Bury's early years priorities:

1. Gaps in developmental outcomes

Despite strong progress, Bury remains below national GLD expectations. The gap is more pronounced for children eligible for FSM, who consistently achieve lower outcomes. Ward-level variation, differing performance between school and PVI settings, and disparities between priority groups further highlight inequalities.

2. Inequalities in access, take-up and engagement

Some families do not access early learning entitlements, the 2–2½-year review or wider early years support. Engagement is particularly low in neighbourhoods with higher levels of EAL,

disadvantage or housing transience. These inequalities delay early identification and limit opportunities for support.

3. Fragmentation across the early years system

Although Bury has strong assets, pathways across health, early education, SEND and family support are not yet fully aligned. Variability in workforce practice, inconsistent quality assurance, and multiple access points can result in fragmented family experiences and missed opportunities for coordinated early intervention.

4. Variations in the home learning environment (HLE)

Local evidence shows differences in parental confidence, literacy, ESOL needs and access to developmentally focused activities. This contributes to gaps in speech, language and communication, early literacy and personal, social and emotional development.

5. Resource and capacity pressures

New responsibilities under the Best Start Family Hubs programme require careful alignment of workforce capacity, digital infrastructure and community delivery spaces. Scaling evidence-based programmes such as PEEP and strengthening SEND, speech and language and infant feeding pathways will require sustained workforce development and partnership coordination.

6. Need for robust data and continuous learning

While data is improving, partners need shared dashboards, joint review structures and consistent measurement frameworks. A clear line of sight from data to action is essential to identify emerging needs, track improvement and adapt delivery.

3.0 CONCLUSION

Bury's Best Start Local Plan provides a comprehensive, evidence-led approach to improving early years outcomes and reducing inequalities across the borough. The plan responds directly to national expectations and local need, setting out a coherent system that brings together health, education, family support and community partners through an integrated neighbourhood model.

The alignment of Better Start, Family Hubs and Start Well governance ensures clear accountability, shared priorities and strong cross-system leadership. Investment from the DfE enables Bury to extend parenting support, strengthen the home learning environment, enhance early identification and deliver high-quality programmes in every neighbourhood.

By embedding early years delivery within the wider Live Well neighbourhood model, Bury is creating a connected, preventative system where families can access support locally, at the right time, in trusted places.

Through collective commitment, data-driven action and continuous learning, Bury is building a system in which every child can thrive, inequalities are actively reduced, and families are supported from conception through to school entry. The plan provides a clear, ambitious and adaptable roadmap for the next three years and beyond.

List of Background Papers:-

N/A