

URGENT DECISION FORM

TO BE UPLOADED ON TO THE INTERNET BY DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Date: 27/07/26		Ref No:	
Type of Decision:			
Cabinet Decision	☒	Council Decision	☐
Key	☒	Non-Key	☐
Subject matter: CYP25-154 - Op Dec - Multiple posts for Best Start Family Hub guidance Approval to Establish and Recruit to Best Start in Life and Family Hub Posts Funded Through Department for Education Grant Funding To seek approval for the establishment and recruitment of a number of fixed-term posts required to deliver the priorities and commitments set out within Bury's Best Start in Life Local Plan and Family Hub Delivery Programme.			
Reason for Urgency: 1. Executive Summary This report seeks approval for the establishment and recruitment of a number of fixed-term posts required to deliver the priorities and commitments set out within Bury's Best Start Local Plan and Family Hub Delivery Programme. The proposal is fully funded through the Department for Education (DfE) Best Start Family Hub Development Grant and carries no financial pressure or adverse impact for the Council's revenue budget. The total staffing expenditure over the life of the programme is approximately £1.99m. The proposed establishment was originally set out within the Best Start Local Plan and associated operational delivery arrangements. The proposals were considered by Scrutiny Committee in March 2026 and formed part of the wider delivery model endorsed through that process. None of the concerns recently raised regarding the proposed staffing structure or costs were identified or raised during scrutiny. The report also seeks Cabinet's support for consideration to be given to the Chief Executive's delegated authority to approve implementation of the staffing proposals as a matter of urgency due to the exceptional circumstances arising because implementation of the Best Start Local Plan is already being delivered against a challenging timetable. The Best Start Local Plan was submitted to the Department for Education in June 2026 and therefore it has not been possible to progress recruitment activity any sooner. Following submission, officers have been required to develop detailed job descriptions, undertake workforce planning activity, prepare recruitment documentation and commence the Council's job evaluation process. A number of the posts still remain subject to final job evaluation outcomes. Further delay risks significantly impacting delivery of the programme, achievement of DfE outcomes, recruitment timescales, implementation of Family Hub reforms and the Council's ability to meet grant conditions.			
2. Recommendations Cabinet is requested to: (i) Approve the establishment of the following fixed-term posts funded through the Best Start Family Hub Development Grant:			

Post	FTE	Grade
Early Years Improvement Delivery Officer	1.0	Grade 12
Early Years Workers	2.6	Grade 8
Early Years Education and Childcare Officer	1.0	Grade 9
Early Years Parenting Practitioners	2.0	Grade 10
Best Start Inclusion Practitioners	5.0	Grade 8
Portage Workers	2.0	Grade 8
Family Hub Community Outreach Workers	2.0	Grade 8

Total: 15.6 FTE

- (ii) Approve recruitment to the above posts for the duration of the **Best Start in Life** grant funding programme.
- (iii) Note that the total cost of £1,991,075 will be fully funded from Department for Education Best Start Family Hub Development Grant
- (iv) Delegate authority to the Director of Early Years, Skills and Education, in consultation with HR and Finance, to proceed with recruitment once job evaluation outcomes are confirmed.
- (v) Note the significant delivery, performance, operational and grant risks associated with any delay in approving these posts.

3. Background

The Department for Education's **Best Start in Life Programme** aims to improve outcomes for children from conception to age five and contribute towards the Government's ambition to increase the number of children achieving a **Good Level of Development (GLD)** at the end of Reception.

Bury's **Best Start Local Plan** identifies a clear need for targeted intervention to improve early childhood outcomes. Current GLD performance stands at 65.2% (2025) compared with the DfE target of 74%, whilst performance for children eligible for Free School Meals stands at 50.9% (2025) against a target of 57.7%.

The plan identifies significant variations in outcomes across neighbourhoods and amongst key vulnerable groups including:

- Children with SEND.
- Children eligible for Free School Meals.
- Children with English as an Additional Language.
- Summer-born children.
- Children not accessing their early learning entitlement.

The **Best Start in Life Programme** provides Bury with over £3.2 million of Best Start and Family Hub funding over three years and requires the Council to implement a comprehensive programme of support relating to:

- Home Learning Environment.
- Parenting support.
- Family Hub delivery.
- SEND inclusion.
- Early identification.
- Early years quality improvement.
- Community outreach.
- School readiness.
- Good Level of Development improvement.

The proposed staffing structure has been developed specifically to deliver these requirements.

4. Why Approval is Required Now

It would not have been possible to progress this proposal any sooner.

The **Best Start Local Plan** was submitted to the Department for Education in June 2026. Prior to this, the final programme requirements and intended use of funding had not been agreed.

Following submission of the plan, the Best Start Team has:

- Developed the detailed delivery model.
- Designed the staffing structure.
- Drafted job descriptions and person specifications.
- Undertaken workforce planning activity.
- Commenced recruitment preparations.
- Submitted roles through the Council's Job Evaluation process.

A number of posts remain subject to final job evaluation outcomes. In short, there has been no avoidable delay in progressing this proposal and officers have moved at pace to develop the implementation arrangements required by the DfE.

Any further delay would have a direct impact on mobilisation of the programme and achievement of the outcomes contained within the **Best Start Local Plan**.

5. Why Existing Resources Cannot Deliver This Programme

The Council has considered whether existing resources could be redeployed to deliver this work, but given the scope and ambition of the programme, this would not be possible.

The Early Years Team is a relatively small team with existing staff already fully committed to:

- Statutory childcare sufficiency functions.
- Early years quality assurance.
- SEND responsibilities.
- School readiness activity.
- Family Hub delivery.
- Early education funding administration.
- Delivery of the Good Level of Development Priority Action Plan.

There is limited capacity within the current team to absorb a programme of this scale. Similarly, resource cannot realistically be sourced from elsewhere within the Council. Other services are experiencing significant capacity pressures and staff outside the Early Years service do not possess the specialist qualifications, experience, knowledge and understanding required to deliver the highly specialised elements of the Best Start programme.

Failure to establish these posts would therefore place delivery of the agreed programme outcomes at significant risk.

6. Contribution of Proposed Posts to deliver Bury's Best Start Local Plan

(i) Early Years Improvement Delivery Officer (1 FTE Grade 12)

This role will provide strategic programme leadership and coordination across the Best Start and Family Hub Programme.

The post will:

- Lead implementation of the Best Start Local Plan.
- Drive delivery against GLD targets.
- Coordinate multi-agency governance arrangements.
- Manage programme reporting and evaluation.
- Support neighbourhood delivery plans.
- Ensure grant compliance and performance monitoring.

Without this role there would be insufficient programme management capacity to coordinate delivery across multiple partners.

(ii) Early Years Workers (2.6 FTE Grade 8)

These posts will strengthen the universal and universal plus Family Hub offer.

The posts will:

- Deliver stay and play sessions.

- Support home learning activities.
- Deliver school readiness programmes.
- Increase engagement from families furthest from services.
- Support parenting programmes.
- Strengthen early identification of need.

These roles directly support delivery of the Home Learning Environment and Family Hub elements of the delivery plan.

(iii) Early Years Education and Childcare Officer (1 FTE Grade 9)

This role will add capacity to the Early Years Advisory Team.

The post will:

- Support quality improvement within settings.
- Strengthen leadership and governance networks.
- Improve quality assurance activity.
- Support schools and providers with children at risk of not achieving GLD.
- Contribute to moderation and assessment improvement.

This role is critical to improving educational outcomes and supporting achievement of the DfE GLD target.

(iv) Early Years Parenting Practitioners (2 FTE Grade 10)

These posts will lead delivery of evidence-based parenting interventions.

The roles will:

- Deliver PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership) programmes.
- Deliver parenting courses.
- Support Solihull approaches.
- Strengthen parental confidence.
- Improve home learning environments.
- Enhance school readiness outcomes.

These posts are integral to the Parenting and Home Learning Environment strands of the programme.

(v) Best Start Inclusion Practitioners (5 FTE Grade 8)

These posts represent a key national expectation of the **Best Start in Life** programme.

The practitioners will:

- Identify emerging SEND needs early.
- Support inclusive practice.
- Coordinate support for families.
- Reduce barriers to accessing services.
- Improve early identification pathways.
- Strengthen outcomes for vulnerable children.

These posts directly support the SEND, Inclusion and Early Identification priorities within the plan.

(vi) Portage Workers (2 FTE Grade 8)

The Portage Service currently faces significant capacity pressures with an increasing waiting list and delays in accessing support.

These posts will:

- Reduce waiting times for families.
- Provide home-based educational support.
- Improve outcomes for children with SEND.
- Support transition into education settings.
- Strengthen school readiness.

This investment supports both the SEND and Early Identification strands.

(vii) Family Hub Community Outreach Workers (2 FTE Grade 8)

These posts will focus on community engagement and access.

They will:

- Work with hard-to-reach communities.
- Increase participation in Family Hub services.
- Deliver community-based activities.
- Promote access to early learning entitlements.
- Reduce barriers to support.
- Strengthen neighbourhood delivery.

These roles directly support accessibility, Family Hub expansion and further reduction of inequalities.

7. Risks of Delay

Ordinarily, expenditure of this scale would require progression through the standard Cabinet approval route. However, consideration should be given to the significant risks that any delay presents.

A requirement to wait for the full Cabinet cycle might potentially:

- Delay recruitment by several months.
- Impact delivery of DfE funded programme milestones.
- Reduce the time available to deliver expected outcomes.
- Impact implementation of Family Hub reforms.
- Delay support reaching children and families.
- Affect achievement of GLD improvement targets.
- Increase risk of failing to meet grant conditions.

Whilst the programme is fully grant funded and therefore creates no pressure on the Council's financial position, delays could create a significant risk of grant clawback if funding conditions, delivery timelines and programme outputs are not achieved.

There is also a substantial risk that delays will impact Bury's trajectory towards achieving the DfE targets of:

- 74% Good Level of Development overall.
- 57.7% Good Level of Development for children eligible for Free School Meals.

Failure to deliver timely interventions would reduce the Council's ability to influence outcomes for cohorts currently progressing through the early years system.

8. Governance and Previous Consideration

The **Best Start Local Plan**, including the proposed staffing structure and delivery model, was considered by Scrutiny Committee in March 2026. The proposals received appropriate scrutiny, challenge and oversight at that time and formed part of the wider programme agreed by members. Concerns recently expressed regarding these posts were not raised during the scrutiny process.

The staffing proposals are therefore not new proposals but form part of the established delivery arrangements required to implement the approved **Best Start** strategy.

9. Financial Implications

The total cost of the proposed posts is £1,991,075 over the life of the programme.

All expenditure will be met from Department for Education **Best Start Family Hub Development Grant**. There are no adverse implications for the Council's revenue budget and no requirement for additional Council funding.

The greater financial risk arises from delaying implementation and creating the potential for grant under-delivery or clawback.

10. Conclusion

The establishment of these posts is essential to deliver Bury's **Best Start Local Plan**, Family Hub reforms and **Good Level of Development** improvement programme.

The posts are fully funded through external grant funding, have been developed following approval of the delivery plan, and are necessary because existing resources do not have the capacity or specialist expertise required.

It would not have been possible to progress recruitment any sooner given the timing of the submission of the **Best Start Local Plan**, the requirement to develop the staffing structure and job descriptions, and the need to complete the Council's job evaluation processes.

Given the significant risks associated with delay, including potential grant clawback, impact on service delivery, reduced ability to achieve DfE targets and lost opportunity for children and families, approval is sought to enable immediate progression of recruitment and implementation of the programme.

The exceptional circumstances currently operating within Bury and the urgency attached to delivery provide a strong rationale for consideration of approval through the most expedient governance route available, including Chief Executive approval within the Council's governance framework.

Equality Impact Assessment

[Does this decision change policy, procedure or working practice or negatively impact on a group of people? **If yes** – complete EIA and summarise issues identified and recommendations – forward EIA to Corporate HR]

Decision taken:

Decision taken by:

Cabinet Member

Signature:

Cllr S Walmsley

Date:

12/8/2026

After consultation with:

Cabinet Member (if a Key Decision) or Chair or Lead Member (as appropriate)

Cllr S Walmsley

12/8/2026

If it is a Key Decision, the Chair of Scrutiny Committee to agree that the decision cannot be deferred

Cllr J Rydeheard

30/7/2026

Opposition Leader or nominated spokesperson (Council Decision) or

Leader or Majority Group Member on Overview and Scrutiny Committee (if a Key Decision) to agree that the decision cannot be deferred

Cllr C Birchmore

31/7/2026

Leader of second largest Opposition Group (if a Key/Council Decision) to agree that the decision cannot be deferred

Cllr J Rydeheard

30/7/2026

Report Author: **Ben Dunne**

Job Title: **Director of Early Years, Education and Skills**

Date: 27/07/26