

ONE PLAN

for all Children and Young
People in Gloucestershire

Starting Well Pillar



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Introduction

Science tells us that a child's experiences from conception through their first five years will go on to shape their next 50. It tells us that the kind of children we raise today will reflect the kind of world we will live in tomorrow. It tells us that investing in the start of life is not an indulgence, but economically, socially and psychologically vital to a prosperous society.

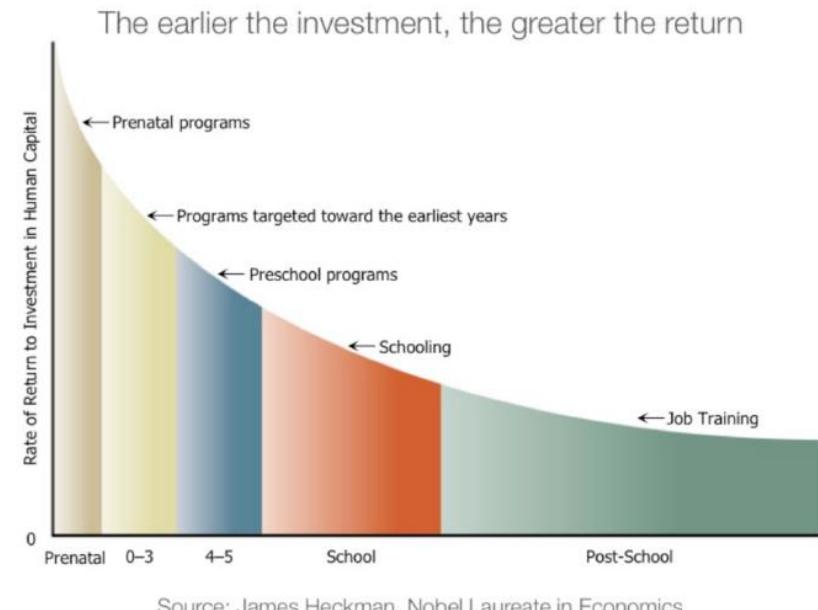
Jason Knauf, CEO of the Royal Foundation, December 2020
Ipsos MORI | State of the Nation: Understanding Public Attitudes to the Early Years, November 2020

The coordination of services, to enable a universal and targeted framework of support from prebirth to age five, is critical for improving the outcomes of children, families, communities and society. In short, there is no better stage in a child's life in which to invest, if we are committed to long-term change. All families need support from time to time to help their babies and children thrive, whether that's from friends, family, volunteers, or practitioners. Our ambition is for every family to receive the support they need, when they need it. All families should have access to the information and tools they need to care for and interact positively with their babies and children, and to look after their own wellbeing.

Evidence is clear that identifying risks early and preventing problems from escalating leads to better long-term outcomes. Universal services which are available to all local families who need them, can help to spot and respond to issues before they develop into more complex problems.

This strategy sets out how we aim to achieve this for the youngest children in our communities and their families in Gloucestershire today. It represents one of three pillars across the child's life stages ('Starting Well', 'Growing Well' and 'Being Well'), underpinned by a foundation of 'Living

Well' that will inform the way we work with, and for, children and young people in the county. 'Starting Well' describes our collective vision for giving children the best start, the outcomes we want to achieve and our priorities for action.



The strategy has been developed, and will be delivered, in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, including children and families themselves. We begin with our vision and principles, feedback from parents and carers and an overview of challenges and opportunities facing children and their families locally. We then set out the outcomes we want to achieve for this age group and conclude with our priorities for action.

A more detailed action plan will be developed for each pillar, to set out a range of actions that will be taken to ensure the priorities are delivered and outcomes achieved.

What we want for all babies, young children, and their families in Gloucestershire

We believe Gloucestershire should be a great place to grow up where all children and young people can thrive and live lives of choice and opportunity, irrespective of where they live, their ethnic background, sexuality, gender identity, special educational needs or disability.

Bringing together the feedback received from children and families, as well as what the data tells us, has led us to identify four objectives to deliver our vision:

Equity - close the gap and eliminate inequalities

Access – right help at the right time for all children

Inclusion – a county where everyone belongs and we celebrate diversity

Quality – effective, outstanding services

Responsibility for driving progress against these objectives will be owned by Gloucestershire's Children and Young People's Coalition board and three subgroups themed around the life stages of Starting Well, Growing Well and Being Well.

To deliver this vision we will be guided by the following principles:

1. **We will listen** – work in partnership 'with' children, families and communities, not 'for' or 'to', build on existing children, family and community assets and aspirations, ensuring everyone can make a contribution, is respected, and that we take a whole family approach.
2. **We will care** – build a culture within our workforce of empathy, using language that cares, acknowledging children and their parents and carers are the experts in their lives, and being welcoming and inclusive for families and children of all ages, cultures, religions, ethnicities, genders, sexuality and disabilities.

3. **We will be fair** - prioritise resources to those that need it most, ambitiously aim to reduce inequalities in outcomes and close the gap.
4. **We will act early** - aim to reduce escalation and specialist support through early identification of needs, building resilience, using restorative approaches, and reduce trauma for children and young people.
5. **It will feel easy** - strive to create integrated services, smooth transitions and pathways to give coherence to children and families' experience of support.
6. **It will work well** - seek to ensure value for money with our resources, avoid duplication and inefficiency, embrace innovations and seek to build on existing evidence based approaches.



What the data tells us it's like to start a family in Gloucestershire

Population change

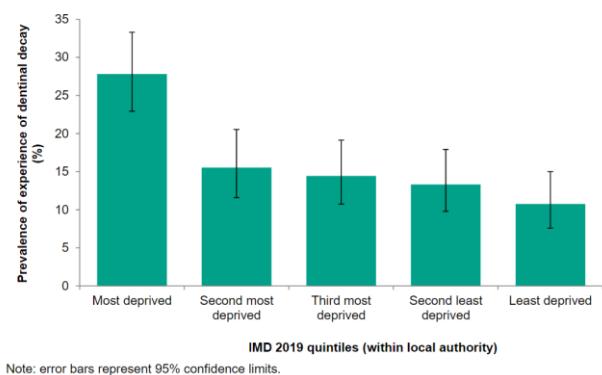
Gloucestershire sees just over 6,000 new births each year, although the number of births fluctuates over time, the general trend has been declining over recent years¹.

Despite the overall increase in population size between the 2011 and 2021 census', this growth was not driven by children age 0-4, which saw an overall decline of almost 4% over the period².

Health indicators

Overall Gloucestershire tends to perform well against England averages for indicators such as levels of immunisation, breastfeeding rates and oral health, however these mask disparities that exist based on deprivation and ethnicity. For example, the proportion of 5 year olds experiencing dental decay in Gloucestershire is significantly lower than the England average (16.8%) however the prevalence in the most deprived areas of Gloucestershire is almost three times higher than in the least deprived.

Figure 3: Prevalence of experience of dental decay in 5 year olds in Gloucestershire, by local authority Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 quintiles.



¹ [birth-trends-in-gloucestershire.pdf](#)

Benchmarking data shows that we have a higher proportion of admissions to hospital for some childhood illnesses and injuries, this needs further investigation but is in part due to hospital policies on when to admit children and the way data is coded.

The Healthy Start Scheme is a government funded scheme that launched in 2006 with an aim to provide a nutritional safety net and improve access to a healthy diet for low-income families. In March 2024, uptake for the digital scheme was 62% across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Uptake for Gloucestershire is currently 61%.

Early Help

Early help and targeted support is an essential part of the offer for children across Gloucestershire. We have observed a steady increase in referrals for targeted support in recent years, which in part reflects earlier intervention to prevent children escalating to social care. In July 2024 there were 10,101 children open on a My Plan or My Plan Plus, of these 80% of the notifications came from education or early years settings, 13% from Gloucestershire County Council services such as Families First and the Education Inclusion Team, 5% from children and family centres and 1% from a combination of health agencies and the voluntary and community sector.

Early education and childcare

Every Local Authority has a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonable, that there are sufficient childcare places to enable children to access their entitlement of funded early education and childcare to support parental employment.

As of June 2024, there are 606 EY settings across the county offering 15,073 places.

74.3 % of childminders and 85.8% of day care providers are registered to offer funded places for eligible 2-year-olds.

78.2% of childminders and 94.3% of day care settings are registered to offer funded places for 3- and 4-year-olds.

Take up of free early years provision for 3- and 4-year-olds is 92% in Gloucestershire and is 76% for eligible 2-year-olds (Autumn term 2023) however local data indicates that children from the most deprived areas and those from minority ethnic groups are less likely to access the offer.

Childcare Reforms announced in the Spring 2023 budget, has extended the entitlement of funded early education/childcare.

From **April 2024**, working parents of two-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of government funded childcare.

From **September 2024**, 15 hours of government funded childcare will be extended to all children from the age of nine months.

From **September 2025**, working parents of children under the age of five will be entitled to 30 hours government funded childcare per week.

91.4% of EY settings are registered good or outstanding, 5% compliant/Met.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile

The EYFS profile is a statutory assessment of children's development at the end of the early years' foundation stage (known as a summative assessment) and is made up of an assessment of the child's outcomes in relation to the 17 early learning goals (ELGs). It is intended to provide a reliable, valid, and accurate assessment of each child's development at the end of the EYFS.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was reformed in September 2021 to improve outcomes for children by ensuring depth of learning;

strengthen their language development and vocabulary, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds; to introduce a focus on self-regulation and oral health and to reduce workloads so that practitioners spend more time with the children, supporting their learning.

Children are defined as having reached a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of the EYFS if they have achieved the expected level for the ELGs in the prime areas of learning (which are: communication and language; personal, social and emotional development; and physical development) and the specific areas of mathematics and literacy. This helps to understand broadly what a child can do in relation to national expectations.

In Gloucestershire over two thirds (67.8%, 2022/23) of children meet the 'Good Level of Development' standard at the end of EYFS. Gloucestershire performs well in comparison to other areas nationally (average 67.2%) and is in line with the peer group average (68%). However, a lower percentage of pupils with vulnerable characteristics (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Free School Meals) as well as those from minority ethnicities in Gloucestershire attained the expected level in comparison to the Southwest and England.

Special educational needs and disabilities

National research undertaken by Dingley's Promise in October 2023 found that 79% of settings have seen a significant rise in the number of children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). Overall, 95% have seen a rise in the number of children with SEND. 27% of providers said they had no more spaces for children with SEND and that once the new entitlements come into place, this will rise to 57%.

National research evidences that parents report significant difficulty in finding early years provision for children with SEN and disabilities and that settings are finding it increasingly difficult to support children with SEN.

In Gloucestershire Early Years Providers are encouraged and supported to actively consider the additional support needs of children with SEND as part of their annual business planning.

Gloucestershire County Council Early Years service provide a range of training, advice, support and resources to early years practitioners and families to support children with SEND.

In Gloucestershire, in the current academic year 2023/24, 132 EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plan) have been issued for children aged 5 years and under.

Although all EY provision delivered by the private, independent and voluntary sector in the county is mainstream, we have a small number of providers who actively promote themselves as supporting children with SEND. These providers operate in the Cotswolds, Stroud, and the Forest of Dean. Gloucestershire County Council has commissioned an Early Years Provision in Gloucester city, this is currently delivered by Dingley's Promise.

Impact of Covid

The pandemic has had a significant impact on access to services for children and families. While many services responded quickly and adapted services in real time to support families, access to face-to-face services, referrals and diagnostics were greatly reduced. The evidence of impacts on babies, children and young people is continuing to emerge, but there are early indications of increased demand for mental health services and a particular impact on those with additional vulnerability, special educational needs and/or disabilities

Babies born around the Covid-19 pandemic have had significantly less opportunity for socialisation, usual activities of baby clinics, stay and play sessions and other activities for new parents did not take place for this group. This has impacted typical patterns of child development, in particular speech and language development and healthy attachments with parents, who may also have suffered stress. Parents' confidence has also been affected by having missed out on opportunities to connect with other

parents, gain advice and support and build friendships. All of which serve to secure a vital social network at what can be a challenging and isolating time of transitioning to parenthood.³ The effects of limited universal support have also led to an escalation of needs for some families which has then put pressure on more specialist services.

Mental health and isolation

Isolation due to the rural nature of the county is a risk and this can be particularly challenging for new families, where contact with other new parents and services can be critical to supporting them on the right path from the start. Mental health is particularly impacted by isolation, and there is a knock-on effect from new parents to our youngest children as they develop at their most critical stage.



³ [Research exploring impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, young people and families \(ncb.org.uk\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8530003/)

What you've told us it's like to start a family in Gloucestershire

Start Well consultation with parents/carers

Insight commissioned to support the Co-production of the Children and Young People's Strategy in September 2023 found that:

- Parents reflected on the importance of children, aged 0-5, having access to outdoor activities and being able to engage with nature. Parents reported there are not enough safe outdoor spaces or outdoor activities on offer, meaning children are not able to meet their desire to explore their surroundings.
- Parents noted that 'good homes' are dependent on parent's understanding of how to support their children to be confident and well-adjusted. Participants recognised the valuable role of health visitors and felt they would benefit from more support from the team if it were available. Parents also reported childcare options are limited, and affordable childcare is often not available.

LGA Early Years Strategy report for Gloucestershire March 2023:

- Parents described services as working very separately, with different recording systems used by different health professionals. Parents were concerned that this leads to delays in referrals being received.
- Parents were concerned about waiting times (up to two years) and telephone appointments for health services. They described rising anxiety during this time. Parents identified feeling that it would be really helpful to be able to access advice whilst waiting for health services. They suggested that early intervention groups would be useful, to access more timely early support and meet other parents in a similar position.

- Transition was felt to need greater support. Providers identified that movement from early years to primary was a concern for children with SEND, due to the significant change of adult-to-children ratios.
- Parents would like clarity around requesting EHC needs assessment for young children. Some parents reported frustration with the current EHC needs assessment timeframe and would welcome more consistent communication with the local authority whilst waiting.
- Parents reported that some nurseries are reluctant to accept children with SEND; the reason given being that they may be unable to meet children's needs. Some parents were concerned that the number of special school placements was insufficient and that this may mean their child staying on in nursery for another year, or being placed in a school that they feel didn't meet their needs.
- Stakeholders reported that recruitment and retention in the early years sector is currently difficult. Providers highlighted that local college placements have stopped (affecting ongoing recruitment of these people). There is work underway by the local authority, with job centres and colleges, to address this issue. The early years workforce (in Gloucestershire and nationally) appears to feel overwhelmed with the increased numbers of children with additional needs. Parents reported that information about early years in general was insufficient; describing the advice as generic rather than tailored. There was confusion over what the different services offered and a desire for more clear information on next steps once a need was identified.

What we'll do for all babies, young children and their families in Gloucestershire

We have identified the following priorities to deliver our four objectives of equity, access, inclusion and quality. We believe that collective action against these priorities will achieve our vision for Gloucestershire as a great place to grow up where all children and young people thrive and live lives of choice and opportunity.

Objective 1: Equity – close the gap and eliminate inequalities

Our data tells us people who have the least in Gloucestershire struggle more than they would in other parts of the country. The reasons for this require further investigation but are likely to include higher costs of living, challenges due to Gloucestershire's rural geography, and a focus on average population outcomes rather than incentives to target children falling behind. We must work together to create the conditions for children to thrive and target our resources where they are most needed.

Priorities	Indicators to measure our success against
Support children and families to be ready for learning and experience positive transition to school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the number of children achieving expected level of development aged 2-2.5 years (Ages and Stages Questionnaire)
Work with families, communities and partners to understand and address the factors that influence lower Early Years Foundation Stage attainment for some cohorts of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the percentage of eligible children accessing early education entitlement. Increase in the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception year (EYFS) Narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation

Promote healthy routines and lifestyles (toothbrushing, immunisation, good diet and nutrition, smoke free homes) through advice, information and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stage Profile and the rest of the cohort (DfE) Narrowing the EYFS attainment gap for children eligible for FSM, those with SEND and those from minority ethnic groups Reduction in the inequality in life expectancy at birth Fewer children living in absolute low-income families Increase immunisation uptake broken down by target groups Reduced rates of tooth decay in lowest deprivation quintile Increased breastfeeding rates by target groups Reduced rates of smoking at time of delivery Reduced overweight prevalence in reception Increased numbers registering for Healthy Start Vouchers Fewer late bookings for first midwifery appointment Reduced rates of emergency admissions 0-4 years Reduced number of re-referrals Reduced rate of escalation to statutory support Increased number of My Plans and My Plan Plus registered demonstrating effective early intervention with families from across the partnership of agencies.
Ensure the consistent and effective application of the Graduated Approach, supporting needs to be met early, reducing the risks of escalation and ensuring children and families are receiving the right support, at the right time, from the right service	

Deliver a core offer of support, services and activities that are accessible to all families, so they are connected to the right advice and support at the earliest opportunity through a network of Family Hubs.

Work with relevant agencies to prevent domestic abuse, substance misuse and hidden harms, and where it exists, provide services to limit the harm and build children's resilience.



Objective 2: Access – right help at the right time for all children

Families tell us the right support isn't always there when they need it. We acknowledge that services are under strain and need to invest in innovative approaches to improve efficiency, early identification of needs and build independence.



Priorities	Indicators to measure our success against
Develop and publish (in formats accessible to all) a clear Best Start Offer, that sets out universal support available, affordable and accessible to all families.	
Work with providers of children and family services and activities to ensure that all families can access childcare, learning, play and support, relevant to their needs, ability, cultural and religious beliefs etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Increased range and number of services and activities available in all communitiesParental satisfaction/feedbackIncreased take up of universal support – by all members of the community
Use all available technology and communication channels to provide information about the support and services available within communities.	
Ensure early education and childcare places are available for and meet the needs of, all children, including those with SEN and disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Monitor and reduce the number of children with SEND unable to access EY/childcareIncrease the percentage of children with SEND attaining a good level of development at end of EYFS
Improve data quality including ethnicity and SEND recording so we know when services are not accessible to or not meeting the needs of specific groups of children and families.	
Improve safety in public spaces and reduce the threat from anti-social behaviour and violent crime, so children, young people and families can get out and about.	

Objective 3: Inclusion – a county where everybody belongs and we celebrate diversity

We know we have more to do to create an inclusive society, that values and respects people regardless of their age, cultures, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or disabilities. For example, our data shows us some ethnic groups are more likely to experience poor outcomes and this may in part be due to unconscious bias and prejudice. We must build a workforce that has inclusion at its core.

Priorities	Indicators to measure our success against
<p>Ensure all practitioners supporting young children and families are confident to welcome and meet the needs of all children, using trauma informed approaches, through a core offer of support and training.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased confidence of practitioners
<p>Ensure a smooth transition into school with child centred communication between all relevant agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing numbers of children with deferred school entry or on reduced timetables Reduced exclusion in reception and primary years Parent satisfaction, particularly feedback following transitions
<p>Provide services and support through Children's Centre partnerships that help communities to build resilience and confidence so that families can support themselves.</p>	

<p>Create communities that celebrate and nurture children's diversity and operate in a climate of inclusivity, including coproduction, awareness raising and training to improve skills and knowledge.</p> <p>Provide training for professionals to ensure they understand neurodiversity and hidden disabilities and provide the right support to increase access to schools and community assets.</p>	
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Objective 4: Quality – effective, outstanding services

Whilst in the main our services perform well, it is essential that we maintain standards and raise performance where this isn't the case. We must move with the times and capitalise on technology developments and innovations, as well as growing a sustainable workforce.

Priorities	Indicators to measure our success against
Raise and maintain the profile and standard of early years education, childcare and best start services.	
Develop a strategy to ensure a diverse, skilled workforce, and promote joint training and induction opportunities.	
Increase collaboration between statutory and VCS sector to share data, understand gaps, reduce duplication, improve services and build capacity to ensure families are offered the right service at the right time and in the right place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Increasing the number of childcare settings with a good or outstanding Ofsted ratingVacancy and staff turnover rates
Develop systems for sharing data across agencies to prevent people having to repeat their story and improve the speed and coordination of response to support families.	
Develop and provide services that respond to the needs of individual communities, using all available population and community data.	

