

Meeting: [Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board](#)

Date: [16 March 2026](#)

Wards affected: [All](#)

Report Title: [Best Start in life – Torbay's Local Plan](#)

When does the decision need to be implemented? [Immediate](#)

Cabinet Member Contact Details: [Nick Bye, Cabinet Member for Children's Services,](#)
nick.bye@torbay.gov.uk

Director Contact Details: [Nancy Meehan, Director of Children's Services,](#)
nancy.meehan@torbay.gov.uk and [Lincoln Sargeant, Director of Public Health,](#)
lincoln.sargeant@torbay.gov.uk

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with the draft Best Start in Life (BSiL) Plan, which is due to be published on the Council's website by 31 March 2026. The Plan sets out how Torbay will achieve its locally set targets for the proportion of children reaching a Good Level of Development (GLD) by age five (end of the Early Years Foundation Stage). It outlines the vision, strategic approach, and delivery mechanisms that will be used to meet these targets.
- 1.2 Publication of the BSiL Plan by 31 March 2026 is a requirement of the Department for Education (DfE), and this draft is presented to members to support transparency and oversight ahead of final approval.
- 1.3 Sign off the final Plan in order to meet the required deadline will be by the Director of Children's Services, Nancy Meehan, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, Nick Bye.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1 The proposals in this report help us to deliver our vision of a healthy, happy and prosperous Torbay by strengthening the foundations of early childhood development and ensuring that every child has the best possible start in life. The Plan sets out how Torbay will address and meet the locally set targets for children meeting a Good Level of Development (GLD) by age five. It provides a coordinated, targeted, evidence-informed programme of support from pregnancy to age five, focusing on improving children's development, reducing inequalities, and ensuring more children are ready to learn and thrive when they start school.
- 2.2 The reasons for the proposal and need for the decision are to formally adopt the Best Start in Life Plan as directed by the Department for Education and enable delivery of a coordinated, system-wide approach to improving early childhood development across Torbay. The plan responds to clear evidence of need, including lower levels of developmental attainment at age two to two-and-a-half, persistent gaps in Good Level of Development (GLD) at age five, and widening inequalities affecting disadvantaged children.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- 3.1 That Members of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Board review the draft Best Start for Life Plan set out at Appendix 1 to the submitted report and make recommendations to the Cabinet.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Best Start for Life Plan.

5. Background Documents

None

6. Introduction

- 6.1 The Best Start in Life Plan sets out how Torbay intends to meet the government-set early years development targets detailed in table one.
- 6.2 The plan has been co-written with stakeholders across the Early Years system, including the Local Authority, Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust (TSDFT), and Action for Children.

Table one: Torbay's GLD Targets 2024 - 2028

Year	All Children reaching GLD		FSM Children reaching GLD target	
	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
2024/2025*	68.5%	749	50.7%	109
2025/2026	71%	776	55%	118
2026/2027	74%	809	58%	125
2027/2028	78%	850	62%	132

** 2024/2025 figures represent actual performance, not targets*

- 6.3 The plan uses Torbay's local data to illustrate where children are performing well and where the most significant developmental gaps remain.
- 6.4 The Plan provides the approach to improving early childhood outcomes from pregnancy to age five, ensuring that more children achieve a Good Level of Development by 2028. It outlines the key strengths of the current system, organised across major areas of the early years offer:
- 6.5 **Home Learning Environment**
The plan highlights the continued development of Torbay's HLE offer, including home-visit support, PEEP, Chat-Play-Read messaging and the Early Years Development Pathway. It reflects how coordinated work across the early years system is helping to strengthen parent-child interaction and early language development.
- 6.6 **Parenting**
Torbay's parenting support offer is well established and delivered through a wide range of evidence-based interventions. The plan describes how this support is now more coordinated, accessible and responsive to parental need, with antenatal, postnatal and early childhood pathways increasingly aligned through Family Hubs.

6.7 **Early Education, Childcare and SEND**

The plan describes strong quality across early years settings, high engagement from providers and a maturing SEND offer including Portage, Small Steps and strengthened referral pathways. It also highlights where capacity, sufficiency and inclusion continue to require targeted action.

6.8 **Healthy Babies**

The Healthy Babies programme brings together infant feeding, perinatal and infant mental health and wider maternal health support. The plan reflects the progress of these programmes and their role in strengthening early relationships, improving emotional wellbeing and reducing the inequalities that contribute to poorer child development.

6.9 **System enablers**

The plan identifies the foundational features that underpin the early years system, including Best Start Family Hubs as the central access point, workforce development, family involvement and improvements in data sharing, monitoring and evaluation.

6.10 Alongside these strengths, the Best Start in Life Plan sets out the gaps that continue to affect children's early development, together with the actions required to address them and the anticipated impact of doing so.

6.11 These gaps relate particularly to:

- The timeliness and consistency of early identification
- The reach of services into communities
- Workforce capacity
- Limitations of current data and digital systems
- Limitations to co-production

6.12 Supported by actions designed to address these issues and demonstrate the impact of doing so, each section of the plan includes a dedicated gaps section that identifies where the system is not yet meeting children's needs, the action needed to address the gap and how these changes will contribute to improved early years outcomes across Torbay

7. **Options under consideration**

7.1 No other options have been considered as this is a DfE requirement.

8. **Financial Opportunities and Implications**

8.1 Not applicable

9. **Legal**

9.1 None.

10. Engagement and Consultation

- 10.1 We have engaged with a wide range of stakeholders in developing the BSiL Plan, including colleagues from across directorates and partner organisations such as TSDFT, Action for Children and wider system partners.
- 10.2 Feedback from families was gathered through Family Hub activity, service-led engagement and routine parent insight, giving us a clear picture of how families understand child development and how they experience current support.
- 10.3 Family involvement and co-production is a core theme throughout the Plan with actions associated with the need to strengthen co-production, improve the reach of services to families who do not routinely engage, and provide clearer, more consistent child development messages. These findings shaped actions across the Plan, ensuring it reflects lived experience and supports inclusive, accessible delivery.

11. Procurement Implications

- 11.1 Not applicable

12. Protecting our naturally inspiring Bay and tackling Climate Change

- 12.1 Not applicable

13. Associated Risks

- 13.1 N/A