



**HEALTHY
BABIES**

Camden's Best Start in Life Strategic Plan



Funded by
UK Government



Camden

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Published: 31/03/26

Foreword

Tim Aldridge, Executive Director Children & Learning

Camden's children have the right to grow up with the best health and wellbeing. Early intervention and prevention promote resilience and can protect children from adversity later in life. Children should be safe from harm and adverse experiences and have access to a good quality education that gives them the best foundations. Camden Council is committed to ensuring that every child has the best possible start in life.

Our plan sets out how Camden will deliver the Best Start in Life and how we will meet the government's targets for increasing the proportion of children reaching a Good Level of Development (GLD) by age five.



Why Best Start in Life?

The early years (from pregnancy to age five) are incredibly important because they lay the foundation for all later learning, health, and wellbeing. Investing in the Best Start in Life is an important part of Camden's approach to prevention and early intervention in the early years:

- 90% of brain development happens before age five
- Early brain development
 - » neural connections form at a rapid rate, shaping how children learn, behave, and respond to the world
 - » early experiences, positive or negative, literally build the architecture of the brain

Early experiences influence physical health, mental health, and even long-term habits like self-care, eating, and activity levels.

Material deprivation is associated with cognitive development. **Family stressors** are associated with social and emotional development. **Structural inequality** can exacerbate inequalities in both of these areas. These three areas are therefore fundamental considerations for how we design and deliver our early years offer.

When we invest in the early years, children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most; achievement gaps narrow, and health and wellbeing improve.

Early intervention costs less and is far more effective than intervention later in life.

Our Vision

In Camden, we are dedicated to ensuring that every family has the support they need to give their baby the best start in life. We aim to reduce inequalities and ensure that every child has the chance to thrive.

Camden's Best Start Plan places a strong emphasis on the critical early years, particularly from pregnancy through to age two, known as the first 1,000 days that lay the foundation for lifelong success.

Understanding that a child's development is profoundly shaped by their family, our plan takes a holistic approach, supporting the whole family and honouring their unique strengths, cultures, and individual needs.

We recognise the deep-rooted impact of structural inequalities, racism, and disproportionality within Camden's communities. These factors can have a profound effect on children's well-being, opportunities, and sense of identity from birth and throughout life.

Our approach is inclusive, responds to difference and inequality, listens to children's and families' voices, and treats everyone with respect. This means incorporating anti-racist and trauma-informed principles into every aspect of our work, be it our practice, policies, decision-making, or service delivery, so that every family receives fair, respectful, and culturally affirming support.

Strong partnerships are at the heart of a successful Best Start plan to reduce inequality. Children and families thrive when the people and services around them work together with a shared purpose. We recognise that no single service can meet every need, and that the best outcomes happen when we build a connected, collaborative system of support. With our partners, we will take a targeted universalism approach and ensure support reaches families with the greatest potential to benefit from services, so that all children can have the best start in life.



Aim

We aim to give all our children the best start in life and reduce the inequality gap in attainment between the most disadvantaged children and their peers. More children will reach a Good Level of Development (GLD) by age five; by the end of the 2027/28 academic year, the target is at least 78.8% of all children, and 69.2% for those entitled to Free School Meals to reach a Good Level of Development.

The First 1000 Days

Evidence shows that the first 1,000 days, from pregnancy until a child is 2, is the most important time for a child's development. It is when the foundations of the brain's architecture and cognitive, emotional, and social capabilities are built and when exposure to stress and adverse experiences can have a lifelong impact.

The first 1,000 days provides a unique opportunity to support children much earlier and before they access early education. Giving children the best start is fundamental to improving lifelong health and to reducing inequalities.

Prevention and early intervention in the first 1000 days is vital because we know that babies who fall behind in the first year are more likely to fall further behind than to catch up with those who have had a better start.



Camden's Approach

Our plan brings together the principles from the first 1000 days and recognises the importance of prevention and early intervention in the early years, from pregnancy to age five.

We are setting out our plans for how we can improve what we offer to families in their communities and neighbourhoods, championing those furthest from opportunity and breaking the link between background and success. Our staff understand the need for support that is tailored to meet individual needs, focusing on flexibility and capability, learning new skills and taking on new challenges. The approach is to deliver what is needed, being skills-driven, supporting our workforce to be agile and adapt quickly, adopt new skills, and deliver support wherever it is most needed.

We start from a really strong base, with significant improvements in children's development in recent years. Since 2022, Camden has made progress narrowing the gap in attainment between children entitled to Free School Meals and their peers from 4.1 months to 2.5 months.

We want all Camden children to be healthy and ready for school by the end of their reception year. Our plan is ambitious and reflects our deep understanding of our population [Children and Young Peoples health needs assessment](#)

Our approach is to support all families and their children from pregnancy to age five, using the principles of **targeted universalism** where services are available to all families, with extra help for those who stand to benefit most.

To achieve our aim, we have identified five Best Start priorities: Safe, Healthy, Happy, Learning, and Engaged, with 2 overarching priority action areas; Poverty and the Best Start for Baby programme.



Values

Camden's Best Start Family Hub core values: Equity, Access and Inclusion

We understand that raising a child is both joyful and challenging and that families do best when support is easy to find, well connected, and built around their needs and strengths.

Families come in many forms, and we recognise and value the diversity of families in our community. Most families will need support at some point in their parenting journey, be it from family, friends or support services. We are committed to using language that reflects and respects this diversity in all our work. Our plan is designed to support all parents and caregivers, including mothers, fathers, non-binary parents, same-sex parents, kinship carers, foster carers, adoptive families, single-parent households, and other blended or non-traditional family structures. We will break down the barriers that can prevent families getting the services they need, especially those with the greatest potential to benefit.

We will evidence commitment to our core values by routinely monitoring who we are reaching and who we are missing. We will report on service reach and outcomes by neighbourhood and by key protected and equity related characteristics, using this insight to centre those with greatest potential to benefit, to meet families where they are, improve access and reduce gaps in early years outcomes.

We want our Family Hubs to be warm, welcoming, and safe places for all families. Staff will focus on family strengths, shared decision-making, and respect for cultural differences and lived experience.

Every contact with a family is an opportunity to offer genuine support and build trusting relationships with families. Camden is committed to delivering inclusive, high-quality early years services through clear and accessible entry points for all families. Services are free of charge and available to all families.

Principles

Our strategy is shaped by eight guiding principles:



Prevention and early intervention



Narrowing the gap – reducing the gap in outcomes between disadvantaged children and their peers



Partnerships and integration for seamless services



Working in partnership with families - co-design, feedback, peer support



Evaluation – understanding impact and improving services



Workforce development – confident, skilled and culturally competent staff



Safeguarding and protecting children from harm



Relational and trauma-informed approaches that make our Best Start Family Hubs warm, safe, and trusted spaces where all families feel respected and supported



Section 1

Data and Evidence

Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life

The Department for Education (DfE) launched [Giving every child the best start in life - GOV.UK](#) in July 2025 and provided funding to all local authorities to deliver the Best Start Family Hub & Healthy Babies programme (2026-2029). This investment means we can further strengthen early years services and ensure that all Camden children have the best possible start in life.

Camden's Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)

The percentage of Camden children that achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of the foundation stage is improving. 69.8% of Camden children achieved a good level of development in 2025 compared to 65.3% in 2022. For children entitled to Free School Meals, the percentage of children achieving GLD increased from 53.9% to 63.1%, an almost 10% increase indicating that the achievement gap in Camden is closing.

National Good Level of Development (GLD) target

The national target is for 75% of 5-year-olds in England have a good level of development by end of academic year 2027- 2028. All local authorities are required to meet the government targets for the percentage of children that reach a good level of development by the end of the reception (age five).

Camden's Local GLD Targets

Every Local Authority is expected to meet or exceed their local GLD targets set by the DfE for the percentage of children reaching a good level of development. **There are two targets, one for all children and one for children eligible for Free School Meals.**

Since 2022, there has been a sustained improvement in the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development. Continued focused intervention will be required to sustain

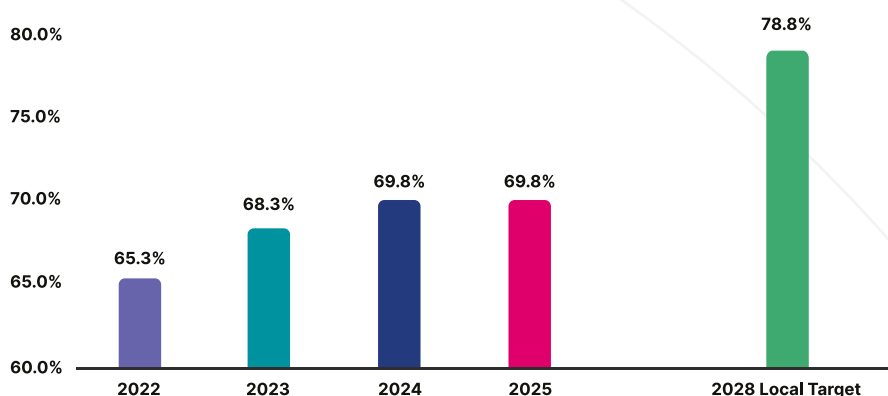
this trajectory to reach our targets and to close the 5.2 percentage gap by 2028, between children eligible for Free School Meals and their peers.

- **Target for All Children**

The proportion of children in Camden achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the 2027/28 academic year is **at least 78.8%. This represents a 9% increase**

- **Target for Children Eligible for Free School Meals; disadvantaged children have benefited at least equally from this improvement;**

The proportion of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the 2027/28 academic year is **at least 69.2%. This represents a 6% increase**



% Achieving Good Level of Development in Camden

Target Cohort

Children born between September 1 2022 and August 31 2023, start reception in September 2027 and form the target cohort.

National and local data consistently show that some groups of children are more at risk of not achieving their GLD by the end of the EYFS. This includes those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, those with a diagnosis or emerging SEND, and others who face structural barriers to early learning.

Families move in and out of the borough and some Camden children attend schools outside of the area, meaning the composition of the target cohort will inevitably change over time. This intelligence will guide the design and delivery of our programmes, helping us to narrow inequalities and improve outcomes across the whole cohort.

Under 5s population

We have a strong understanding of Camden's under 5 population through our data-sharing agreement with Central and North West London (CNWL), which provides health visiting and school nursing services in Camden. This provides us with a live view of the local pregnancy to age five population, including basic demographic and geographic information and indicators of service engagement. We use this intelligence to understand demand and need across Camden's communities.

We are using data to identify families who have not accessed support, targeting outreach and service improvements to provide an accessible and equitable service for all.

Child Poverty

Camden is a borough of extremes: you must either be very wealthy or experience multiple disadvantages to live in the borough. In 2023, the average price of a terraced house in Camden was £2million, while at the same time 2 in 5 children live in poverty.

Depth of deprivation is also increasing, as acknowledged in the national [Child Poverty Strategy - GOV.UK](#) with the promise of a new depth of deprivation measure. Many families on low income are unable to find stable housing, are struggling with debt, and may be unable to afford essentials like heating and food.

As a result, poorer families are faced with more restricted choices than their peers. Adverse experiences in childhood will add up, and with that the odds of children being able to fulfil their potential are lowered. It also builds up stressors within the body, affecting healthy child development and long-term health, wellbeing and economic prospects. Increasing choice, providing a safety net for adversity and reducing family stressors is the best way to minimise harm caused by poverty, and is most effective in early years.

We know that children living in low-income households are 1) less likely to achieve a good level of development by age five and 2) likely to experience intersecting inequalities, such as ethnicity and learning difficulties and disabilities. In Camden 48.6% of children have English as an additional language, there are 99 languages spoken by students in Camden schools and 61% of our school population are from Global Majority groups.

Raise Camden

Raise Camden is a partnership innovation programme aimed at improving child health equity in Camden. It tests and learns from initiatives aligned to three core themes: child poverty, whole family mental health and wellbeing, structural racism and inequality. It is led and informed by our Health and Wellbeing department, in close collaboration with Family Hubs, Financial Resilience, Housing and Strategy, Design and Insights teams, as well as external partners as part of a collective [impact programme](#).

In May 2025, UCL (University College London) Institute of Health Equity published an [independent report into child health equity in Camden](#). The report highlighted a number of issues that are specific, but not unique, to Camden where collective action is required.

These realities highlight the importance of equity, access and inclusion, and targeted universalism within Camden's approach to helping families whose circumstances increase the risk of poorer outcomes.

We are committed to delivering support to reduce the impact of poverty and to maximising income for families disproportionately affected by low income and the cost of living. We want families to experience improved financial stability, reduced stress, and have greater confidence in navigating the welfare system and the support available through the family hubs and partners.



Where are we now? Successes

More women are taking up their antenatal appointment with their midwife before 10 weeks of pregnancy: 59% in 2024-25, compared with 50% in 2023-24 and 45.2% in 2019-20



Health Visiting: In 2023-2024, 97.9% of babies received the new birth visit



SEND:

Training delivered at scale - Autism Education Trust "Making Sense of Autism" (65 participants across family hub and partners) and "Neurodiversity-Affirming Practice" (98 council maintained nursery staff attended)



New 'Step in and Play' (quiet) sessions for SEND children – ensures stay and play offer is inclusive for children with SEND

Unicef Baby Friendly Status:

Family Hubs are eligible to complete Stage 3 award and to proceed to Gold with Community Health Visiting services



Child poverty: In 2024-2025, the Benefits Support and Welfare Advice Team secured £2.2 million for families



Perinatal Mental Health:

Reducing the stigma of asking for help and making it easier for parents to access support. Psychology services are now available in the family hubs, as part of the Best Start for Baby programme



The percentage of children reaching a **Good Level of Development** in Camden has improved from 65.3% in 2022 to 69.8% in 2025 and is now above the England average and very close to the average for London



Since September 2025, **6 Parent Champions** secured paid employment due to their increased confidence and skills gained through the programme, **34 volunteers** are accessing further training and **64 Parent Champions have contributed to shaping local services** by taking part in a variety of focus groups, ensuring family voices are central to local decision-making



What have families told us?

Families have told us about their experience of services, which services are helpful, how they prefer services to be delivered, and where they would like more support.

"Camden Dads" is a great opportunity for dads to spend quality time with their babies, bond with them and also get to learn from and interact with other dads. It's great for building the community."

"Our Family Worker has given my son, family and I so much support that I am getting my confidence back. They helped with applying for grants, nursery school, signposting to services, giving advice and helping to create a village for my little one and myself."

"I can see that there is so much more on offer to families with children with SEND. I was hoping this would happen as there is such a need. It's a very different experience from when my first child was born to my fourth. And with Best Start for Baby I can see problems being picked up earlier." - Parent Champion, SEND service offer / BSFB

"I really can't thank you enough for all your advice. I walked in just looking for some guidance and feeling quite overwhelmed, and I left feeling so much calmer and more informed. I genuinely appreciated how kind and supportive you were, it really meant a lot to me." - Parent feedback, IEW support"

"I learned how to deal with my daughter's needs as now have much better understanding of what and how to deal with the situation so much calmer and more understanding." - Parenting programme

We will continue to work with partners and families to improve services and make a difference for children and their families. We will ensure that all families have access to information and support in the early years, and that extra help is offered as early as possible.

Section 2

Best Start Family Hubs

Camden's Best Start Family Hubs

Camden launched Family Hubs in June 2023, building on established and trusted children's centres across the Borough. Family hubs are central to prevention and early intervention, contributing to Camden's commitment to improve outcomes for families, children and young people.

There are five Best Start Family Hubs in Camden:

- [Kilburn Grange](#)
- [Regent's Park](#)
- [Harmood](#)
- [1a](#)
- [Agar](#)

Family Hubs are designed to:

- Provide an access point to services for the whole family, 0 to 10 and 25 for young people with special educational needs, with a strong Healthy Babies offer at their core
- Offer information about services to support all families by providing help with the challenges they may face

Co-location

Co-location is important for our family hubs bringing together multi-agency teams to deliver universal, targeted and specialist services. There are shared spaces in the family hubs to enable the co-location of staff and services, making it easier for families to access help in their neighbourhood. Our strong partnerships support a wide range of free services offered to all families, alongside targeted support for families who may need extra help. Services are delivered in the family hubs and across the family hub networks.

Youth Hubs

Camden benefits from a strong offer for young people including youth hubs offering warm, safe spaces for our young people to visit to have fun and seek advice and support when required. Rather than merge youth hubs with family hubs we have protected the unique characteristics of both and are working to ensure that the offer is more joined up for families.



Family Hubs Camden

Camden has invested in leadership at a local level, with our Locality Leaders creating strong partnerships across health, education, Voluntary and Community Sector and Faith organisations. Each Family Hub has a local network that links services and partners together. This helps us understand what families need and offer support close to where they live.

Family Hub Networks help us to join-up services with, for example, libraries, schools, youth hubs NHS partners and VCS services to provide consistent information for families. The termly Network meetings bring parents, partners and Family Hub staff together to talk about what's important for families in the area.

Parent Feedback

"I have attended lots of meetings and focus groups since becoming a Parent Champion, listening to how services need to change and sharing my opinions. I am so pleased to be here to see this is all happening now."

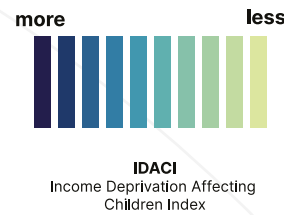
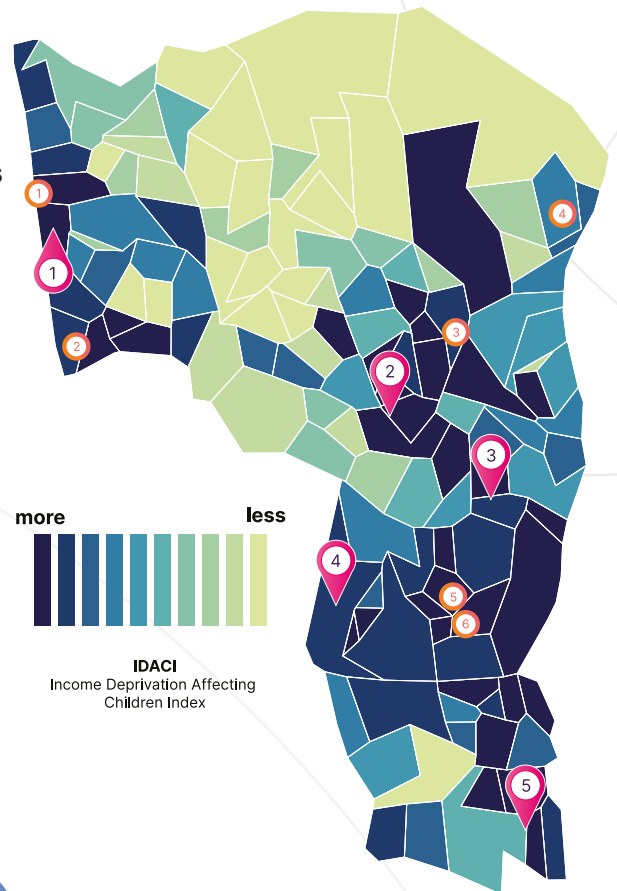
Partnerships are well established and are essential to deliver effective and joined-up services. Working together means we make the best use of our combined resources, reduce inequality, and improve outcomes.

With our partners, we are responding to families' needs and the compelling evidence which supports prevention and early intervention during the critical first 1000 days from pregnancy to age two and throughout the early years.

Collaborating closely with communities, VCS partners, faith groups, local networks and across council departments helps to ensure support is accessible through places that families trust, is culturally relevant, and builds on our strengths.

Together we will strengthen our joint efforts to achieve the best start in life for all children and their families.

Family Hubs, Youth Hubs and linked sites



- 1. Netherwood Youth & Family Hub
 - 2. Langtry Nursery
 - 3. Rhyl Community School
 - 4. Highgate Newtown
 - 5. Somers Town Youth Centre
 - 6. Hampden Children's Centre
-
- 1. Kilburn Grange Children's Centre & Family Hub
 - 2. Harmond Children's Centre & Family Hub
 - 3. Agar Children's Centre & Family Hub
 - 4. Regent's Park Children's Centre & Family Hub
 - 5. 1a Children's Centre & Family Hub

Section 3

Working with Families

We recognise the important role of communities with opportunities for parents to support each other through peer support and social networks. We will strengthen peer support to help all families access the support they need, when they need it.

Co-design

We work in partnership with families and communities to design and deliver integrated support, ensuring that services are culturally sensitive and responsive to diverse family structures. Families contribute to designing and evaluating services, providing insight about barriers to using services and how we can improve.

The Early Years & Family Hub Service and Partners value families' views and their feedback about services. Designing services which meet different needs and are offered in a way that makes sense to families can only be achieved by working with families and responding to their views and opinions.

You Said, We Did It Together

Co-design enables decisions about service planning and improvement to be responsive to families' views and to evidence this by saying "you said, we did it together". Thank you to all the families who shared their views to help us develop this plan.

Healthy Babies Parent Carer Panel

In 2023, Camden established the Parent Carer Panel that helps to co-design local council services for families with children from pregnancy to age 2. Expectant and new parents volunteer their time, offering insights and feedback, critical to designing and improving services. Other Co-design groups also meet to focus on specific areas of service provision and parents' experience of service is understood through feedback, routinely collected and analysed.

Healthy Babies Parent Carer Panel – what did parents tell us?

“Safe environment to voice your opinions and concerns about the services in the area. Learnt about new offerings. Found out about other people’s struggles and opinions.”

“You got a chance to give your personal view and share your experience to support further plans for the better of parents.”



Peer Support

Peer support is embedded in our approach through the **Parent Champions programme** and **Camden Baby Feeding Team**. Parent volunteers are representative of Camden’s diverse communities and help break down barriers to access by promoting the family hub offer in local communities and supporting service delivery.

Parents who volunteer often tell us about the positive impact the experience has on their well-being. Volunteering builds parent’s confidence and social connections and many go on to training and to find paid employment.

‘Attending the event was very valuable to me. I really enjoyed meeting other volunteers and learning about the wider opportunities available in Camden. It gave me the motivation and courage to think about my career direction. After connecting with Good Work Camden at the event, the team provided support, and I have now secured a role with the Family Hubs admin team, which I am very excited about.’
- Homestart Volunteer

Family Story:

The Role of Peer Support in Empowering Recovery

In January 2025, a parent referred by her family worker, joined the Parent Champions training course. Having survived domestic abuse and a long recovery, she faced significant challenges reintegrating into her community and had lost much of her confidence. From the outset, the volunteer coordinator offered a warm welcome and consistent encouragement, including regular phone calls to support her attendance at the training sessions. A turning point came when she recognised a familiar face in the group — another parent from her child's school. Their immediate bond helped her feel at ease and more open to the experience of completing the training. Week by week, her confidence grew. She began staying after sessions to share her journey with the coordinators, reflecting on her progress and the positive changes she was experiencing. Upon completing the course, she became an active volunteer, supporting community events, attending focus groups, and promoting local services at her children's school.

She shared: "This has been such a big stepping stone for me. I have found my voice again and reconnected with my community. I have made friends and feel much more confident."

Her journey is a testament to the power of peer support, compassionate engagement, and the importance of creating safe spaces for healing and growth.



Family Story:

Supporting families with children with SEND

As a mother of four SEND children, one of the parent champions understands first-hand the challenges of accessing the right help and support. Her personal journey has inspired her to become a strong advocate for improving services and raising awareness and has shown exceptional commitment to supporting Camden families with children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). Over recent months, she has observed positive changes in Camden's SEND offer and felt compelled to be a voice for other families. Being neurodiverse herself, she initially found it challenging to express her thoughts calmly. However, through regular one-to-one meetings and phone calls, she developed strategies to manage this and significantly improved her communication skills. She has completed SEND training and built strong links with local SEND services. She has participated in several focus groups with council officers, contributing her valuable lived experience, including at the Children's Trust Partnership Board. She created a WhatsApp group for SEND parents, providing a space to share information about available support and training opportunities. Her dedication and energy have helped build a more connected and informed SEND community in Camden, and her voice continues to make a difference.

Early Years Volunteering Partnership

The **Early Years Volunteering Partnership** brings together council, VCS and NHS organisations that offer volunteering opportunities and peer support to families with young children. The partnership shares resources, training and expertise and promotes information about volunteering opportunities in the borough. Our annual event celebrates the amazing contribution of volunteers and their commitment to supporting Camden families.

Outreach

Our **Family Hub Outreach Strategy** is designed to support our staff to understand that all Camden families should know about the support on offer and to take action to help families access services.

This means we focus on families who will benefit most from services and face the biggest barriers to accessing services, offering support in family homes, family hubs, on-line and in community venues across Camden. We make every effort to contact families to encourage and support their participation.

Section 4

Strategic Links

Giving every child the best start in life and the Best Start Family Hubs & Healthy Babies programme are central to the whole government approach to integrated, locally tailored approaches focused on prevention and early intervention. Best Start Family Hubs are closely linked to Neighbourhood Health, social care and educational reform and the Child Poverty Strategy.

Camden's Best Start in Life strategic plan is aligned to national and local strategies, ensuring we are all working together to transform outcomes for children and families, especially those facing disadvantage. This plan will support implementation of these cross-cutting national and local strategic agendas to achieve the same overall goal of reducing inequality.

National Strategy

Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies programme, (2026-2029): Targeted universal support for healthy babies and school readiness, viewed as a ‘critical window for cognitive, physical and emotional development.’

National Reforms in Social Care (2025): The programme provides investment to design and test radical reforms across the following policies: family help, child protection family networks and safeguarding partners.

NHS 10 Year Plan and **Neighbourhood working**: Promotes a whole-system approach via place-based health centres, providing health and family services.

National Youth Strategy (2025): Coordinated and effective support will be provided through strengthened partnerships across families, education, health, and community sectors.

Young Futures (2025): Outlines funding for Youth Futures Hubs, that will bring together services within local communities to create tailored support.

Child Poverty Strategy (2025): Features a call to action for “strengthening local support for families”. We hope this strategy can be an exemplar of how we can bring together the implementation of both strategies.

Opportunities Missions (2025): Aims to break down barriers so that every child—regardless of background—can succeed in learning and life. It prioritises early years support, high quality schooling, and coordinated action across services to improve children’s long term outcomes.

London Opportunities Mission: The London Opportunities Mission has focused on narrowing the gap in good level of development scores between children in receipt of free school meals and their peers. It is taking this forward across

London through five workstreams: Outcomes framework; Dataset; Workforce; Language and communication needs; Addressing the free School meals gap; Family hubs and placed based approaches. Camden representatives sit on the strategic board.



Working towards building an integrated system of local support around families, children and young people

These national policies, guidelines and agendas promote the collaboration and joining up of early years, early help, education, health, safeguarding and voluntary sector organisations, in order to:

- **Make the system easier to navigate for families**
- **Identify needs early on, connecting to universal or specialist support sooner**
- **Enable families to access and build networks of support**

We hope this strategy can be an exemplar of how we can bring together implementation across these cross-cutting agendas.

Local Strategy

Camden's Neighbourhood Model

One of Camden's missions is that by 2030, Camden's estates and their neighbourhoods are healthy, sustainable and unlock creativity. The Family Hubs, located in neighbourhoods, are the main vehicle for delivering this objective for children and families. Work is also underway to develop Camden's neighbourhood model with Family Help teams for children, integrated teams for adults' health and social care services and a place-based approach to housing support.

The aim is to build connections between these integrated teams, our three youth hubs, schools and family hubs to provide a seamless service for families.

Camden Health & Wellbeing Being Strategy

Camden's Health & Wellbeing Strategy (2022 – 2030) sets out the shared principles, ambitions and priorities for improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities. It identifies how we will work together and with our communities to achieve better health and wellbeing for all. Start Well is one of the priorities for improving health outcomes.

Camden Building Back Stronger Education Strategy to 2030

The ambitions of **Building Back Stronger, Camden's Education Strategy to 2030**, are for everyone to have a Fair Start, an Excellent School Experience and Flourishing lives. The educational outcome gap between those growing up in disadvantage and their peers will be reduced. The vision is that by 2030, every child will have a more equal start in life and have the support and skills necessary to succeed in education.

Camden Local Area SEND Strategy 2022 to 2027

The strategy outlines how support and outcomes for children and young people with SEND aged up to 25 years old will be improved. The ambition is for children and young people with SEND to lead happy, fulfilled and rewarding lives.

There are 3 priority areas: Make life easier for families of children or young people with SEND, support children and young people with SEND to thrive in learning, health and wellbeing, and enable young adults with SEND to build a good life locally.

Section 5

Our Priorities

Our overall aim is for more children to reach their expected level of development by age five and to narrow the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers.

To achieve this aim, we have identified five priorities to improve outcomes and narrow the gap in attainment between children on low incomes and their peers.

Our 5 Priorities



1 Safe



2 Healthy



3 Happy



4 Learning



5 Engaged

With two overarching priority action areas:

- **Child poverty**
- **Best Start for Baby, strengthening the universal [Healthy child programme - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/programmes/best-start-for-baby)**



SAFE Personal Security	HEALTHY Physical Wellbeing	HAPPY Social, Emotional & Personal Wellbeing	LEARNING Cognitive Development	ENGAGED Feel engaged in a Community
Safeguarding & Family Help	Pregnancy & birth	Perinatal mental health	High quality early education & childcare	Father-inclusive practice
Domestic Abuse	Breastfeeding	Parent-infant relationships	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)	Reducing barriers to access Outreach Peer support Co-design Comms
	Oral Health	Parenting support		
	Immunisations	Early language & home learning environment		
	Healthy weight	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)		
		Reducing parental conflict		

Child Poverty

Poverty during childhood can harm health and wellbeing, both at the time and later in life. Poverty not only impacts children in their early years but also has a long-term impact on their future health, wellbeing and economic prospects.

- Two in five children live in poverty, after housing costs are considered
- 44% of Camden pupils are eligible for free school meals



Cost of Living Events

Cost of Living events delivered in the family hubs enable families to be better informed about the services available. Working with council teams such as Good Work Camden and the Money Advice Team and with voluntary sector partners such as Little Village and Life After Hummus, helps families living on a low income to access the support they need.

Cost and Quality of Housing

We recognise that housing-related costs and quality of housing are key concerns for families living in poverty. Children in the early years are especially affected by housing instability and overcrowding. Housing instability disrupts routines and environments critical for brain development. Research highlights this period as a “sensitive phase” where poor housing has disproportionately long-term effects. Conversely, safe, stable, healthy homes promote better educational, health, and economic outcomes.

Working with housing colleagues enables access to housing advice in the family hubs, including delivering regular housing advice surgeries.

Raise Camden Taskforce

The council has established the Raise Camden Taskforce co-chaired by the leader of the Council and Prof. Sir Michael Marmot to consider 'sticky issues' for families living in poverty. This forum sets the recommendations and priorities within the Council and with external partners.

Test learn projects are already underway, including:

- **Family Hubs Pregnancy Grant:** We are proactively identifying any pregnant women and birthing people in the borough in receipt of any qualifying benefit and contacting them with the offer of a one-off £500 cash transfer. Those who accept this offer are then offered a follow-up by a Family Navigator and Information & Engagement Worker to introduce them to our wider Early Years offer
- **Low Acuity A&E follow-up clinics** invite families of children under 5 with repeat A&E attendance for non-urgent reasons to have a follow up review with a Pediatrician and Health Visitor. By basing these follow up clinics in Family Hubs we can ensure all preventative healthcare opportunities are met, as well as linking families to community-based early years support
- **The Equitable Services Programme** is a quality improvement programme supporting the identification and understanding of inequities in service provision. It also provides tools to engage families in trialing solutions to address these inequities. An early pilot with the Starting Solids programme was well-received. The health improvement offer increased take-up from our most deprived families from 15% to nearly 40%

Partnership with the National Children's Bureau (NCB)

Camden is developing a strategic partnership with the NCB. We are currently mapping the statutory offer in early years up to age 8, and voluntary sector engagement at a neighbourhood level. This will inform a planned approach to meeting families where they are, recognising the voluntary and community sector contributions to family support.

We are working with partners and across the council to further integrate our approach, enabling parents to access

support and to focus on their children's wellbeing and development, and we are:

- Continuing to work with Housing Service colleagues to enable easier access to advice and support for families to seek help with their housing needs
- Strengthening our links to temporary accommodation to ensure tailored family support is available to families experiencing instability
- Continuing to develop and evaluate new approaches "test & learn"

Benefits Support and Welfare Advice Team

We want to improve parental wellbeing by reducing the impact of poverty and help families support their children to be ready for school.

The Benefits Support and Welfare Advice Team continues to focus on income maximisation to reduce poverty. The team has expanded the pregnancy to age five offer to include families with children 0-19 years and 25 years for young people with Special Educational Needs

In 2024/25, the Benefits Support and Welfare Advice team secured £2.2 million for families across 732 claims, representing an £878k increase (+60%) from the previous year. Demand for the service continued to rise, with referrals increasing from 468 to 572 (+22%) and open cases growing from 318 to 391 (+23%). Around one third of clients are fathers, reflecting strong engagement across family types. The largest increase in referrals was seen in Kilburn and Kentish Town, areas with some of Camden's most deprived wards.

Universal Credit was the most claimed benefit, followed by Disability Living Allowance and Housing Benefit. Most families supported had children aged 0-5, and the team worked closely with health visiting, the parenting support team, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services to help families stabilise their finances during the crucial early years.

Yes, we are managing to afford our bills month to month a bit better whilst being able to focus on my daughter's care."

"Everything changed it's been an incredible experience. The advisor is phenomenal. I now receive disability living allowance for my child and have had all of my universal credit changed because of her support. I wouldn't know any of this without her."

"I am in a financially better position because the advisor supported me to apply for Disability Living Allowance benefit for my daughter and I have a better understanding about my benefits. I'm pleased that I saw the advisor for advice, and I have recommended other people to the service. I rely on this service and appreciate the hard work Yvonne has done. Thank you."

We aim to:

- Increase investment in the Benefits Support and Welfare Advice Team to ensure families receive timely support to claim their benefit entitlements
- Continue to maximise income during the early years and beyond

What will be different?

- Household income is maximised for families and financial stability increased
- Families feel more confident dealing with their benefits or in finding suitable support with their benefits
- Families access a support offer that helps to reduce the impact of low income



Best Start For Baby

Best Start for Baby (BSfB) is Camden's enhanced healthy child programme delivered by health visitors, community nursery nurses and psychologists. This programme lays the foundation for prevention and early intervention in the early years.

BSfB is an innovative programme offering all families appointments every 3 months in the first year. This approach increases the number of contacts required by the national Healthy Child Programme.

Best Start for baby recognises the joy of parenthood and the challenges of the first year, a time of rapid change. We want all families to have access to support when they need it, especially families experiencing disadvantage.

Best Start for Baby offers support for children's development and for parents' health & wellbeing, offering frequent opportunities for prevention, improving earlier identification of need and access to the family hub offer. This includes mental health support delivered by psychologists in the family hubs.

We aim to:

- Continue to develop the BSfB programme to improve earlier identification of need
- Further develop the psychology offer to reduce the stigma of mental ill health and to offer early intervention
- Use the findings from our external evaluation of Best Start for Baby to assess how effectively the service is engaging families who can benefit most from support and implement improvements. The research is being led by the University of Edinburgh, supported by a National Institute of Health Research grant



What will be different?

- Higher take-up of Best Start for Baby, especially by families who will benefit most.
- Earlier identification of need and access to support

Safe

Safeguarding and Family Help

Safeguarding and child protection means keeping children safe from harm, especially harm caused by abuse, neglect, exploitation, or violence. Child protection is not only about intervention, but also about helping families overcome challenges so they can provide safe and stable care.

In April 2025 Camden Council's children's services was rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.

Camden is committed to:

- Ensuring children grow up in safe, caring environments where their physical, emotional, and developmental needs are met
- Recognising when a child may be suffering or is likely to suffer harm, for example when there are signs of neglect, physical harm, emotional abuse, or unsafe living conditions

Child Protection

In England, during 2024/25, the number of children on Child Protection Plans and Children in Need remained consistently high, with case complexity increasing. In Camden (2024-2025), the highest number of referrals to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) were from the police, from external and internal local authority services, NHS partners and schools. 43% of referrals to children's social care resulted in a Section 47 child enquiry to assess if the child is suffering significant harm.

The data highlights a persistent and troubling pattern of disproportionality in Camden's child protection system. It reveals that children from Black, Mixed, and Asian backgrounds are consistently overrepresented at various stages of intervention, while White children are significantly underrepresented. Black children face the most pronounced disproportionality; despite making up only 9% of the child population.

Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP)

Shared vision: All children and young people in Camden are safe, thriving, and heard

CSCP is a multi-agency statutory body established to ensure that local safeguarding arrangements are effective. In Camden, the three lead safeguarding partners are Camden Council, North Central London Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the London Metropolitan Police Service, who work in collaboration with Camden Learning. CSCP sets policies, conducts reviews, provides training and ensures that all agencies work together to protect children.

In 2024, CSCP updated its safeguarding arrangements to reflect the changes in [Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK](#). The refreshed approach puts a stronger focus on working closely with parents, keeping children at the centre of decision-making, and making sure that all lead safeguarding partners share responsibility for creating a joined up and effective safeguarding system.

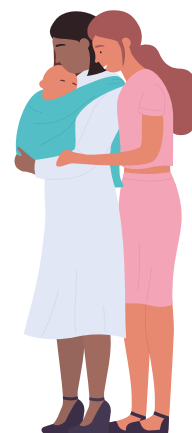
Child Deaths

Since 2008 it has been a legal requirement in England for Child Death Overview Panels (CDOP) to review the deaths of all children up to the age of 18 years. The aim is to learn lessons from these deaths and identify ways to prevent future tragedies. The North Central London (NCL) CDOP reviews the deaths of all children who are resident in the NCL boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington.

North Central London Annual Child Death Report 2024/2025

Key findings include:

- In 2024/25, a total of 88 deaths were recorded, representing a small decrease from 92 the previous year
- The greatest risk of death was in the first year of life. More than half of deaths were for children aged under 1 year
- The most common primary category of death was “chromosomal, genetic and congenital anomalies” (31.1%), followed by “perinatal/neonatal event” (22.3%) and “malignancy” (14.9%)



Equity

- 28.2% of deaths occurred in children living in areas of NCL amongst the 20% most deprived in England
- The White Other, Black or Black British and Asian or Asian British ethnic groups had the highest child death rates. The rates in these groups were significantly higher than that for children of White British or Irish ethnicity, who had the lowest child death rate

To complement the quantitative findings, a case review process was undertaken to identify key themes emerging from the case notes from each child's death. **Key learning fell under three broad headings, with learning points related to:**

- **Wider determinants of health**, poverty and deprivation, housing, immigration-related issues, maternal BMI (Body Mass Index), unsafe sleeping, consanguinity and antenatal issues
- **Communication**, with learning points related to general communication with families and care providers, culturally appropriate communication, language support and trust
- **Other**, with learning points related to privacy after a child dies, out of hours care, pharmacy involvement, palliative care, barriers to engaging with services and engagement with the child death review process

Recommendations: The NCL CDOP identifies several core themes which remain year on year. A three-year strategic programme of multi-agency work has been proposed, focusing on:

- **2026:** Poverty proofing and stigma and reduction of domestic abuse
- **2027:** Structural racism and inequality and mental health support
- **2028:** Barriers to engaging with services and serious youth violence
- In addition, individual organisations have been identified to lead on different recommendations. Some examples include work related to safer sleeping in overcrowded conditions and support for maternal nutrition

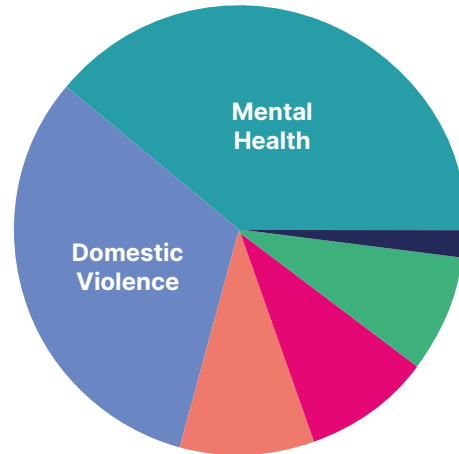
Vulnerable parents and the first 1,000 days

In line with previous years, the largest proportion of serious incident notifications in 2024-25 related to children under the age of two years (four serious incident notifications in Camden). The extreme vulnerability of babies under one year is recognised nationally.

The CSCP multi-agency pre-birth assessment guidance provides a framework for those working with expectant parents to assess risks to unborn children and provide help and support.

Parental vulnerability factors identified through assessment (CSCP Annual Report 2024-25)

Camden's established strengths and relational approach are shaping the local delivery of national social care reforms. We are developing the Family Help offer, integrated with local services and the Family Hub model. The Family Help offer aims to bring a greater focus on early intervention and reduce the number of times families are transferred between services.



Parental Vulnerability Factors 2024-25

- Domestic violence (31.7%)
- Mental (ill) health (25.9%)
- Drug use (7.9%)
- Alcohol misuse (7.5%)
- Physical disability (6.8%)
- Parent learning disability (1.6%)

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a significant social issue with profound impacts on women, children, and families. It violates the rights and freedoms of women, and often children, to live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives. Taking a life-course approach, Camden recognises that children and young people are not only witnesses to VAWG, but are also survivors and victims in their own right. This includes the impact of living with and alongside mothers and carers who are experiencing abuse.

VAWG encompasses a wide range of harmful behaviours, including:

- Domestic abuse (physical, emotional, and psychological abuse within intimate or family relationships)
- Sexual violence (including rape, sexual assault, and harassment), human trafficking and exploitation
- Harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage

Children and young people who are exposed to VAWG may experience: significant emotional, developmental, and psychological impacts. However, these experiences do not inevitably determine their future wellbeing. Protective factors, such as nurturing and responsive parenting, strong emotional development, and consistent and trusted relationships, can build resilience. Early identification and trauma-informed, tailored support are critical in mitigating harm and improving outcomes. Over the past five years, Camden has significantly strengthened its multi-agency response to VAWG and now has a well-established partnership approach to both prevention and intervention. Camden's first VAWG Strategy (2026 to 2029), sets out a comprehensive life-course approach, addressing the needs of individuals across the life course.



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Recognising that preventing and responding to VAWG is fundamental to improving outcomes for babies, children, and families we are focusing on 5 priorities:

- **Prevent** violence against women and girls before it occurs, including through education and tackling underlying inequalities
- **Identify** needs early, ensuring women, girls, and affected children receive timely support
- **Provide support**, ensuring survivors of all ages can access high-quality, trauma-informed services for as long as needed
- **Hold those who harm to account**, while supporting behaviour change where appropriate
- **Work in partnership**, delivering a coordinated, whole-system response across services and communities

Relational Practice Framework

In 2024-2025, work started to implement **Camden's Relational Practice Framework**. The framework is value driven, designed to foster trust, compassion, and collaborative relationships. Camden's model is unique in combining relational practice with the principle of community power, recognising that everyone has something to contribute and should be valued for it.

We aim to:

- Continue to ensure our Best Start Family Hubs are warm, safe, and trusted spaces where all families feel respected and supported, breaking down the barriers to seeking help
- Conduct an audit of early years staff safeguarding training, ensuring all staff have the skills and knowledge to identify when children are at risk of harm
- Deliver Social GRACES training and embed practice
- Continue to develop greater engagement of fathers The Myth of Invisible Men in early years services recognising both the positive impact of fathers on children's development and to recognise risks early
- Continue to learn from serious incidents to deepen our understanding of how to improve systems and practice

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse can have a long-lasting impact on children. In 2023–24, domestic violence and abuse emerged as the most commonly identified factor in social work assessments in Camden.

Exposure to domestic abuse places children at significant risk of both short- and long-term physical and psychological harm. A lack of safety and stability in the home can lead to enduring negative outcomes, potentially affecting wellbeing in adulthood. All agencies work together to protect children and families from domestic abuse [Domestic abuse and sexual violence - Camden Council](#).

We aim to:

- Strengthen preventative and universal services to create trusting relationships between families and staff, reducing the barriers that prevent victims from disclosing abuse
- Ensure staff are confident to ask safe, sensitive questions, and trained to spot the early signs of abuse and to identify risk
- Work with perpetrators of domestic violence to increase accountability for abusive, or controlling behaviour and to increase awareness of the impact of abuse and to support changes in behaviour



What will be different?

- Children are protected from harm, threats and the impacts of adversity
- Earlier access to support and increased safety for victims of domestic abuse

Healthy

Pregnancy and birth - transition to parenthood

Pregnancy provides a wealth of opportunities to support expectant parents to have better outcomes for themselves and their babies. When there is a healthy pregnancy and children grow up in families where there is good parental mental health, with sensitive and attuned parents and a high quality home learning environment, children are more likely to achieve at school, able to make friends, to cope with adversity and have healthy adult relationships

Early access to maternity care and early years' support increases the likelihood of good maternity outcomes and the best start in life. There are indications that more women are taking up their antenatal appointment with their midwife before 10 weeks of pregnancy: 59% in 2024-25, versus 50% in 2023-24 and 45.2% in 2019-20.

Although maternal and neonatal death is rare, the disparities in outcomes are significant. For women and their babies from global majority groups and those experiencing poverty. Black women are 1.5 times more likely to experience neonatal death and Asian women around 1.3 times more likely to experience neonatal death compared with white women. Most current MBRRACE* report states that the risk of maternal death for Black women is nearly three times higher than that of White women.

(*MBRRACE-UK: Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK)

A 'one size fits all' approach to maternity care does not serve the most vulnerable or consider differences in women's abilities to understand or access their care. These factors contribute to inequalities in healthcare provision, alongside cultural barriers and insufficient training of healthcare professionals in cultural sensitivity and knowledge.

We aim to:

- Continue to strengthen the relationship between maternity, health visiting and family hub services, expanding the reach of our targeted antenatal offer
- Focus on supporting anti-racist practice and equity of access to culturally sensitive and personalised maternity care, alongside more joined up services across maternity and early years
- Work with our regional maternity and neonatal system and boards, help embed an equity and equality action plan, and further develop and promote the antenatal offer, ensuring all families can access support and have positive experiences
- Use evidence-based tools such as Maternity Disadvantage Assessment tool (MatDAT) to enable the maternity system to better identify and respond to social complexity

What will be different?

- Reduced inequality in maternal and neonatal outcomes
- Families who will benefit most access support



Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding has many well established benefits for both babies and mothers.

Benefits for babies include:

- **Nutrition** - breast milk contains the perfect balance of proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals needed for a baby's growth. It also adapts over time to meet changing needs
- **Stronger immune system** - breast milk is rich in antibodies that help protect babies from infections
- **Better long-term health** - research shows breastfed babies have a lower risk of asthma, eczema, obesity, type 2 diabetes, childhood leukaemia
- **Improved brain development** - some studies suggest breastfeeding is associated with slightly higher cognitive development

Benefits for mothers include:

- **Recovery after birth** - breastfeeding releases oxytocin, which helps the uterus contract and reduces postpartum bleeding
- **Convenient and cost effective** - breast milk is always available, at the right temperature, and free
- **Reduces health risks** - mothers who breastfeed have a lower risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease
- **Supports bonding** – skin to skin contact and hormones released during breastfeeding help strengthen emotional connection and the parent-infant relationship

Whilst breastfeeding rates are relatively high in Camden, there are areas for improvement.

In Camden, 83% of babies are breastfeeding at the new birth visit (10-14 days). Breastfeeding rates at 6-8 weeks are higher in Camden (77%) compared with the national average (around 52%).

Camden Baby Feeding Team offers breastfeeding and safe bottle-feeding information and support. The team contacts all families within 72 hours of birth and offers a range of 1-1 and group-based support in the Family Hubs, other community venues, in family homes and on-line, including access to the Anya App - 24/7 Tailored Healthcare Support.

[UNICEF Baby Friendly Stage 3 Accreditation](#) was achieved in Camden in June 2023, successfully meeting the criteria for Achieving Sustainability in 2025. The aim is to reach the Gold Award standards in 2026.

We aim to:

- Deepen our understanding of how we can support all families in making their baby feeding choices
- Focus on ensuring support is accessible to those least likely to breastfeed and who experience the biggest barriers to support
- Use data to improve our understanding about families who may need support to continue breastfeeding and tailor support to improve access for all families

What will be different?

- More babies are breastfeeding at birth and at 6 to 8 weeks



Oral Health

In 2023/24, 27% of Camden's five-year olds experienced dental decay, and persistent inequalities mean that children living in the most deprived areas are more likely to be affected. [National Dental Epidemiology Programme \(NDEP\) for England: oral health survey of 5 year old schoolchildren 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

The oral health promotion service works to improve oral health and reduce inequalities for children in Camden while supporting them with accessing mainstream dentistry.

Our offer includes:

- **Brushing for Life packs:** Providing free toothbrush and toothpaste
- **Supervised toothbrushing:** Delivering a supervised toothbrushing programme for 3–4-year olds which we are expanding through additional national funding to the most deprived areas
- **Fluoride varnish:** Targeted fluoride varnish application for children aged 3–7 in primary schools with high free school meal eligibility



We aim to:

- Deliver oral health promotion sessions for families, early years settings and schools, alongside training for the early years workforce, ensuring that families receive clear, evidence-based oral health advice

What will be different?

- More children attend a dentist for regular check-ups and fewer children have dental decay

Healthy Weight

The ability to maintain a healthy weight throughout life can be shaped by experiences in early childhood. In early years services, we strive to ensure that families are supported to make the best decisions about the food their children eat and how to keep them physically active.

In Camden, 19.6% of children in Reception class at school are overweight or obese. The prevalence of overweight (including obesity) was 1.6 times higher in children living in the most deprived areas compared to the least. 1.37% of children in reception were underweight.

Healthy Weight Acceleration Plan

To address the needs of residents of all ages, Camden launched the **Healthy Weight Acceleration Plan (HWAP)** in April 2024 in response to the health and wellbeing crisis linked to population levels of overweight and obesity. The plan has been endorsed by the Health & Wellbeing Board and is overseen by a leadership group from the Council, NHS, Schools, and VCS organisations

Reducing and reversing this crisis requires local/national action on a range of factors, including environmental change, support for healthy behaviours (such as eating well and being active), treatment, and promoting mental wellbeing, drawing together the collective action of a broad range of organisations and sectors.

Together partners work across five workstreams: Early Years, schools, Organisations & Place Shaping, Weight Management Services and Population Groups with greater needs.



We aim to:

- Ensure that all Early Years staff receive training to support under 5s with healthy eating
- Roll out updated weight management pathways for children and young people, considering issues with access, translators, transport, and taking a whole family approach
- Develop a programme of work to support improved nutrition and physical activity levels during pregnancy, in response to findings from the annual child death report, where maternal BMI remains a contributory and modifiable factor often linked to premature births
 - » Identify further opportunities to support healthy eating, physical activity and the wider healthy weight needs of children and young people in Camden through programmes such as: Healthy movers, Starting Solids, Healthy Start, Family Kitchen, Families for Life, Little Steps to Healthy Lives
 - » Develop a communications campaign to support families around physical activity and healthy eating
 - » Link in with infant feeding work to ensure that families are supported with nutrition and healthy weight of infants and children

What will be different?

- More children are a healthy weight

Immunisations

Childhood immunisations are important because they protect children, families, and entire communities from serious diseases. Vaccines prevent illnesses that can cause serious complications, disability, or even death - such as measles, meningitis, polio, and whooping cough. Even though we see these diseases less often today, they still exist and can spread quickly in unvaccinated groups. In Camden, the data for immunisation coverage shows there is a need to improve take-up so that children have received all their routine vaccines by the age of five.

- Published COVER data for Camden (April 2024-March 2025) shows that we have similar coverage to our neighboring boroughs for routine childhood immunisations (0–5-year-olds) but remain lower than the national average
- Coverage for routine childhood immunisations that are due before a child’s first birthday ranged between 83.2% (Rotavirus) and 86.1% (6 in 1)
- For vaccines due by age 2, coverage ranged between 78.6% (PCV booster) and 87.9% (3 doses DTaP/IPV/Hib/HepB)
- The lowest data was reported for children aged 5 for vaccines that they should have received routinely aged 3 years and 4 months
- MMR 1 and MMR 2 coverage for children aged 5 was 81.3% and 64.6% respectively

We aim to:

- Explore barriers to vaccination by undertaking a project in five of our GP practices with the largest number of unvaccinated children under 5. We will use the results of the study to help develop interventions, e.g. improving access, communication, prioritising engagement with local communities
- Commission [Jitsuvax](#) to deliver workshops to our Health Visitors and school nursing team and empower them to combat vaccine hesitancy and effectively communicate key messages with our local communities
- Continue to deliver information sessions on vaccines in Camden’s British Somali community centre and co-produce communications
- Camden is one of 12 national sites successful in applying for National Health Service England (NHSE) commissioned health visitor pathway finder. A specialist immunisation health visitor (SIHV) has been appointed to start working with GP practices with the largest number of unimmunised children under 5 years

What will be different?

- More children receive their immunisations

Happy

Perinatal Mental Health

Camden's joint strategic needs assessment of perinatal mental health (PMH) identified gaps to help inform the future delivery of services. Mental health problems in the perinatal period are very common, affecting up to 20% of women and around 10% of men.

About half of all cases of perinatal depression and anxiety go undetected, and many of those which are detected fail to receive evidence-based forms of treatment. This is partly due to a lack of recognition and awareness of mental ill health and its signs and symptoms, stigma and underrepresentation in universal preventative support of certain Global Majority Families.

Perinatal mental health training has been delivered across the early years workforce to build knowledge and confidence in identifying when PMH difficulties arise and to support families to access interventions.

Clinical Psychologists are now part of the Best Start for Baby teams to support easier access to specialist help in the family hubs, without the need for referrals and to reduce the stigma of asking for help.

We aim to:

- Improve identification of Perinatal Mental Health difficulties as early as possible and ensure swift access to support
- Continue to develop the Perinatal Mental Health offer delivered through Best Start for Baby and across early years services
- Continue to develop workforce skills, including through reflective practice groups and access to expert consultation
- Develop pathways to help families from all cultural backgrounds access the right support to meet their needs

1 in 5 Women



(1 in 10 Men)



Experience of Perinatal Mental Health Problems

What will be different?

- Perinatal Mental Health needs are identified earlier and parents access support

Parent-infant Relationships

The quality of early parenting and attachment is a major predictor of long-term outcomes in children, including physical and emotional health, school readiness, and future relationships.

Babies who develop secure attachment patterns with their parents and carers during infancy have improved developmental outcomes, and these attachments can act as a buffer to babies against the detrimental impacts of poverty and other environmental factors.

Supporting parent-infant relationships (PIRs) can help parents meet their baby's social and emotional needs. Becoming a new parent can be an exciting and hopeful time for many. For some parents this can also be a time of heightened anxiety and worry, and can give rise to many unexpected feelings, thoughts and behaviours. Domestic abuse, poor mental health, and frequent, unresolved parental conflict can impact parents' ability to bond with their baby.

Around 15% of babies will not develop an emotional connection with a supportive and nurturing adult, which will have long-term effects on a child's social, emotional and cognitive development.

We have delivered training to our early years workforce to enhance their skills and knowledge to support positive PIRs and identify parent-infant relationship difficulties as early as possible. Staff are supported through reflective practice sessions to develop their practice. Interventions such as Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) and Circle of Security are offered to families when they need additional support.

We aim to:

- Deliver further training to ensure staff are confident to identify parent-infant relationship difficulties at the earliest opportunity and to offer early intervention to support positive parent-infant relationships
- Further develop practice by introducing evidence-based tools to support PIRs
- Evaluate the impact of support and interventions

What will be different?

- Better identification and access to support for parents experiencing parent-infant relationship difficulties

Parenting support

We deliver evidence-based parenting programmes for parents and carers to enhance and develop their parenting skills to support their child's development. Our parenting courses support parents and carers to build on strengths and support positive, caring relationships within the family. Courses are open to all Camden families and can be accessed in person or online, offering flexible options to suit different needs and circumstances.

We offer four evidence-based parenting courses for all families from pregnancy to age five years, in person groups, 1-1 and online.

The [Home - Togetherness](#) programme includes:

- Understanding your Pregnancy
- Understanding your Baby
- Understanding your Child's Behaviour
- For children aged 3 - 4 years, we deliver [Triple P](#)

Since the launch of the parenting support offer in January 2024, we have delivered:

- **23 antenatal courses** (Understanding your Pregnancy), including in other languages to support the Bengali, Arabic and French speaking communities
- **37 Togetherness courses** (Understanding your Baby and Understanding your Child's Behaviour)
- **37 Triple P courses** in **10 school nurseries** and in family hubs and nurseries settings.
- We have also supported parents to access parenting classes by delivering classes one-to-one. During 2025, we delivered **one-to-one parenting classes to 16 parents**

Our free [parenting classes](#) offer is available to all available to all Camden families. The classes are free and accessible via the Camden Family Hubs website. Online parenting support enables families to access a wider range of courses in their own time and at a pace that is suited to the individual. The online parenting classes are available in English and in 108 other languages.

We aim to:

- Continue to strengthen and expand our parenting support offer. This includes delivering classes in community settings and in a range of community languages, ensuring support is culturally responsive, respectful, and accessible to families from all backgrounds
- Work with families to understand the impact of our offer and to learn how we can continue improving our practice

What will be different?

- Parenting classes are accessible to all families and have a positive impact

Early language and home learning environment

Early communication, language and literacy skills are vital to school-readiness and outcomes in later life. Early language acquisition impacts on all aspects of children's non-physical development, contributing to their ability to manage emotions and communicate feelings (social and emotional development), establish and maintain relationships and to learn to read and write.

Camden Kids Talk

To respond to the increasing numbers of children with communication and language delay we launched **Camden Kids Talk (CKT)**, which brings together parents, professionals, and community services to support children's early communication and language.

CKT is a preventative approach to supporting early language from pregnancy to age five. We will continue to strengthen our approach to working with families, faith organisations, and education, health, and voluntary sector partners.

Tiny Talkers

Tiny Talkers is a group for children with identified communication and language delay following their 1 year Best Start for baby appointment.

The Tiny Talkers model recognises parents as the key influence on a child's development, equipping them with the strategies and confidence to support communication within everyday routines. This includes practical guidance linked to the Camden Kids Talk Ten Top Tips and evidence-based advice available through the BBC Parenting website.

This approach shifts practice away from the belief that only specialist services can support a child with identified language needs, and instead strengthens families' capacity to make meaningful, sustained improvements in their child's early language and communication development. Importantly the approach also supports earlier access to specialist pathways when needed providing a stepping stone to more targeted and specialist assessment.

Parents told us:

- Sessions were informative, practical, and enjoyable
- They appreciated the helpful tips and strategies to understand and support their children's communication and development, such as observing the child's interests, babbling back, reading, singing, and encouraging play
- The sessions were described as engaging, well-organised, and delivered in a friendly, welcoming environment with a good selection of toys and activities
- Improved connections with their children
- Supported their Child's communication skills and gain confidence in supporting their child's development at home
- The small group setting and personalised advice were particularly valued. Several mentioned the importance of the opportunity to ask questions and learn through demonstrations

"...very helpful sessions, I have improved the way I use language around the house and mindful of how my child uses new sentences" - Parent

"I found these sessions very helpful. My 2-year-old does not speak much so it also helped me with her." - Parent

"I really enjoyed the sessions. Spending time with my child. It was lovely seeing so many parents enjoy themselves." - Parent

"Stay, Play & Learn is a model we will be able to easily and successfully transfer over to reception and continue with in the Summer term in nursery." - Nursery Staff

"I really enjoyed the sessions. Spending time with my child. It was lovely seeing so many parents enjoy themselves." - Nursery Staff

We aim to:

- Take further steps with colleagues and partners to improve early identification of language delay, offering support to help children who are not reaching their expected level of development.
- Support all staff to build their skills and confidence and feel better equipped to support language development so that children and families are supported as soon as possible

What will be different?

- Children with communication and language needs are identified using a common assessment tool at age 1 year, 2 years and 3-4 years
- More children reach their expected level of development in communication and language by age 2



Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Around 1 in 5 children and young people in Camden maintained schools are supported for SEND, and a quarter of these have an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP), indicating a higher level of support needs.

More primary-age children are being identified with having an Autistic Spectrum Disorder and communication and language needs. More children with SEND are often identified at times of transition, for example, starting school. Children with SEND are more likely to miss school and be suspended at least once and often have health conditions such as asthma or depression.

Camden's joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) into SEND identified several inequalities including a slightly higher percentage of children with SEND amongst:

- Black/Black British children and mixed ethnic communities
- Children eligible for free school meals and children living in areas with high levels of poverty
- Children and young people known to social services and the youth justice system

Families have told us that they don't always feel supported while they are waiting for assessments and interventions. Some are frustrated by the system when seeking a diagnosis and support for their child's needs and many families feel let down by past experiences.

To continue to work on making our Family Hubs truly inclusive for all families and in response to families' views, we have created a specialist role to lead the development of community-based SEND support, including:

Workforce Development to better understand how to meet needs

- Autism and Neurodiversity training has been delivered at scale with a yearly rolling programme now in place
- Implemented a training programme of inclusion focused on Stay & Play for early years practitioners, family hub practitioners and partners, and maintained nurseries with a rolling annual programme established
- Established a SEND advice line, offering fast practical guidance to Family Hub frontline staff

Parent Support & Engagement

- Promoting parenting programmes: MyChild, ATLAS, Understanding your child with additional needs (Togetherness)
- Offered interventions such as VIG and emotional wellbeing offers
- Delivered themed parent coffee mornings (autism, SEND and play, sleep)
- Established routine sharing of SEND services and developments across Family Hubs, CDT, Education and the Local Offer via bulletins/newsletters
- Coordinated “My Local SEND Resources” parent workshop termly sessions to bring services directly to families

Inclusive Best Start Family Hub Environments

- Introduced Quiet/Reduced Number Stay & Play sessions in response to feedback from parents
- Sensory support bags have been piloted in two family hubs
- Provided Sensory Support Bags, available at Family Hub receptions to support sensory needs when visiting for appointments
- A strengthened sensory room SEND offer, with support for parents from an Early Childhood Worker and information for parents explaining the benefits and how to use the sensory room
- Widened access to sensory rooms and strengthened SEND sensory room booking process, by offering support from Early Childhood Workers to guide parents on using the resources, and published parent handouts

Co production & Insight

- More structured monitoring of SEND enquiries and increased outreach by Early Childhood Workers, including at Child Development Team appointments
- New SEND training developed for Parent Champions
- Improved data sharing across MOSAIC, Family Hubs, Education and specialist services to support targeted engagement
- Better identification of families awaiting assessment or not yet in early education



We aim to:

- Ensure Camden's family hubs are welcoming places for all families, including for children who have special educational needs or disabilities
- Continue to support staff to build their confidence, skills and knowledge in supporting families with children with SEND
- Continue to invest in improving support for children with SEND and emerging SEND. to ensure all children and their families have access to community services as well as specialist support, as soon as difficulties emerge
- Create and promote "walkthrough videos and social stories" to reduce anxiety about visiting the family hubs for the first time
- Rollout sensory bags to all family hub sites in March 2026
- Evaluate the sensory room offer, including take-up and family's quality of experience

What will be different?

- Children with SEND and emerging SEND will have access to community services, adjusted to their needs
- Children and families feel they are supported, listened to and included

Reducing Parental Conflict

We want all children to grow up in stable, supportive homes. Reducing parental conflict is a priority, as even low-level conflict can affect children's wellbeing. Persistent unresolved conflict is known to have a significant impact on children's wellbeing.

Families can access free, evidence based online support available through the family hubs website, alongside guidance from practitioners across our Family Hubs.

This work directly supports Family Hub outcomes by improving child wellbeing, enhancing co parenting, reducing stress within the home, and enabling earlier identification of parental relationship difficulties.

We aim to:

- Equip parents with practical skills to communicate more effectively, manage conflict constructively, and understand its impact on children
- Through increased engagement with family hub services and stronger community connections, raise awareness about healthy relationships and support families to reduce parental conflict
- Launch a campaign to promote healthy relationships and support families to reduce parental conflict

What will be different?

- More families access support earlier to maintain healthy relationships and to reduce parental conflict
- More staff are trained and confident to support healthy relationships and help families access earlier support.

Learning

High Quality Early Education and Childcare

Children in Camden benefit from high quality early education and childcare offer, provided through a mixed model of Private, Voluntary and Independent nurseries, childminders, school-based nursery classes, a maintained nursery school and five council-maintained nurseries. Providers and childminders are supported by a team of Quality Advisers, so children experience high quality early learning wherever they attend.

Camden is committed to ensuring families can access early education and childcare that is affordable, local and high quality. We have maintained childcare sufficiency across the borough, ensuring there are enough places in the right locations. We keep a clear focus on quality, using Ofsted inspection outcomes to address any areas of concern early.

Camden's enhanced offer for three and four-year-olds ensures families on low income and working parents can access up to 30 hours of funded early education and childcare. This builds on the national funded entitlements and helps to reduce barriers to take up.

We aim to:

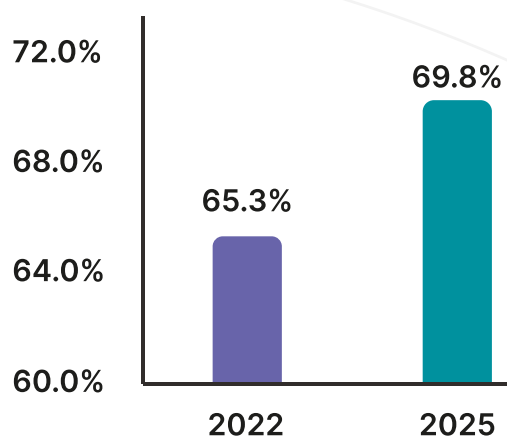
- We will continue to promote and improve access to funded offers so that families understand what they are entitled to and how to take it up. [Help with childcare costs - Camden Council](#). Keep childcare sufficiency under review across neighbourhoods, with a focus on inclusion for children with SEND
- Strengthen quality of practice through targeted support for providers and childminders, including workforce development
- Reduce barriers to take up by providing simplified information and signposting, working with providers so families get timely help to access the offer
- Track take up and access gaps by neighbourhood and key inequality markers, using that insight to shape outreach so the offer reaches families who benefit most

What will be different?

- More families access their funded early education and childcare entitlements
- More children will experience high quality early learning to support school readiness

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)

The EYFSP provides information about children's development at the end of reception (age five) and their readiness for school. The percentage of children reaching a Good Level of Development in Camden has improved from 65.3% in 2022 to 69.8% in 2025 and is now above the England average and very close to the average for London.



% Children reaching a good level of development

We aim to:

- Continue to invest in the first 1,000 days and early years to reduce inequality and to meet or exceed the government targets for good level of development by July 2027.
- Use linked early years and health visiting data to understand which experiences and service touchpoints are associated with better readiness outcomes, and to target support where most needed

What will be different?

- At least 78.8% of all children and 69.2% of children eligible for Free School Meals will reach a good level of development by end of academic year 2026/27

Engaged

Father-inclusive Practice

Camden Dads was launched in June 2022 to raise awareness of the benefits of delivering father-inclusive services. Ensuring fathers and male carers are considered equally in all aspects of service delivery was a priority, taking a preventative approach, starting during the antenatal period.

Good progress has been made in developing a strategic system change approach to raise awareness of the importance of engaging fathers and the positive impact this has on children.

Father-inclusive practice team audits are undertaken annually and now involve 15 teams including, early childhood team (stay and play drop-ins), volunteering and engagement team and admin teams. Analysis of the recent five-year audit evidences progress in maturity level, a shift from individual practice to team-wide expectation, rather than relying on individual dads' champions.

Dads told us:

"Sessions are a great way to bond and have fun with my son, great opportunity for children to learn and get used to interacting with other children."

"We attended baby massage which will help me improve the bedtime routine (and hopefully help with sleep)."

"This service has made being a dad so much easier, giving time and space for one on one time."



We aim to:

- Refine father-inclusive practice training to strengthen understanding of why father engagement matters and build staff confidence to work with fathers
- Continue to engage more dads earlier, focusing on pregnancy and the transition to parenthood, and good mental health. In particular exploring innovative ways to engage fathers who find it hard to access or who have had negative experiences of accessing services
- Ensure there is consistency across all teams on data reporting and provide evidence of improvement in fathers' engagement in all services
- Evidence improvement using the father-inclusive audit and share learning

What will be different?

- Staff feel more confident to work with fathers
- More fathers engage in services



Breaking down the barriers

Our values; equity, access and inclusion, underpin our approach to supporting all families

Families have consistently told us that they often have difficulty knowing what support is on offer in Camden. Families who are most disadvantaged are often less likely to access information and support. This means that inequalities persist because families who would benefit most from services experience too many barriers.

Feedback about services is very positive, however some families tell us they have missed opportunities for support because they didn't know what was available to them. Other families experience significant barriers to accessing support, and many experience the stigma associated with asking for help or lack of trust in service provision. Families also tell us that some services are insufficient or need to have further flexibility to meet individual needs.

Some families may simply need information provided in a way that is accessible to find the services most appropriate for them. However, for some families:

- A range of outreach initiatives are required to support the level of engagement suited to needs and tailored to individual family circumstances
- Work with VCS partners and trusted community leaders is essential to build relationships as for some families trust in council and health services can be low

How are we breaking down the barriers?

By delivering services through family hubs and family hub networks, ensuring information and support is available to all families across the borough, close to where they live.

Stay and Play

The **Giving Every Child the Best Start** strategy highlights the importance of baby and toddler sessions and community based family activities and the importance of play in early development alongside accessible early learning opportunities in community settings. [The UK's International Education Strategy 2026](#) strongly emphasises the essential role of play in early childhood development, communication and social skill building and preparing children for school. Play is a core component of early education, family hub services and parent-child learning support.

Play is essential because it helps children learn, grow, and understand themselves and the world around them. It develops their minds, bodies, emotions, relationships, and creativity through fun, natural experiences. Play is one of the most important ways children learn and supports development across every area.

Our universal stay and play sessions are open access without the need for referral or an appointment, encouraging all families to visit the family hubs without any expectations of engaging in a conversation about their circumstances or needs.

The sessions are run by Early Childhood Workers with expertise in early years child development, supporting parent-child interactions to enhance communication and language development.

The sessions offer space for families to play and have fun with their child, can act as a gateway to other services, and provide opportunities to meet other parents, make friends, and reduce social isolation.

We aim to:

- Further develop a flexible home-based offer, 1 to 1 or small group sessions or activity to engage parents and children who may find services hard to access and would be more likely to engage through support at home
- Make greater use of outdoor spaces to offer opportunities for play
- Work with parents to co-produce effective ways to support parents and children with SEND
- Work with colleagues to ensure a seamless offer of support ensuring mums, dads and carers, and children navigate and access stay and play and wider services within the perinatal period
- Support children's communication development and signpost, and refer children who may need additional support

Successfully engaging all families requires a multi-faceted approach:

- **Co-design:** With families, to meet the diverse needs of all families in Camden.
- **Comms:** Implementing our communications plan, making information available to all families in a variety of ways
- **Outreach:** Being committed to outreach to help families overcome barriers to accessing services
- **Data:** Using data to understand take-up of services to enable effective outreach to families who experience barriers to access

- **Workforce development:** Supporting our workforce to develop the skills to build trusting and respectful relationships with families
- **Location and a flexible offer:** Services are provided in the family hubs, schools, libraries and other community buildings, as well as online and at weekends.
- **Co-location:** Teams are located in communities across Camden for easier access to all services
- **Peer Support:** Creating volunteering opportunities for parents to support each other
- **Evaluation:** Understanding the difference services are making, and improving the offer

We aim to:

- Continue to ensure services are accessible to all families and strengthen the family hub networks to help families navigate the offer
- Through strong leadership, ensure there is commitment at all levels and within all teams to our core values; equity, access and inclusion
- Continue to use data effectively and take time to understand the data collected about our communities and the diverse needs and backgrounds of the communities we serve
- Continue to support access for families who face the biggest barriers to access, taking a targeted universalism approach
- Support staff to be trauma-informed and build trusting relationships
- Foster a culture of anti-discrimination and anti-racism and encourage participation by all families and communities
- Support staff to develop cultural competence to engage families from diverse backgrounds
- Further develop the Camden family hubs website [Families - Camden Council](#)
- Create campaigns to promote inclusiveness and awareness of the support on offer
- Continue to work with families to co-design services and understand their experience of services
- Measure outcomes, and adjust services as needed to better meet the needs of the community

What will be different?

- More families will have the information they need
- Data analysis provides evidence that a high proportion of families with greater risk of poor outcomes, engage in and benefit from support

Section 6

How will we monitor our progress?

Our outcomes framework will help us to understand and measure the impact of our Best Start in Life plan. Monitoring data, listening to family feedback, and sharing progress holds us accountable for delivering better outcomes for families. To keep families and partners informed about how we are doing, we will publish updates on progress along with data to evidence improvement, [Common outcomes framework](#).

Governance

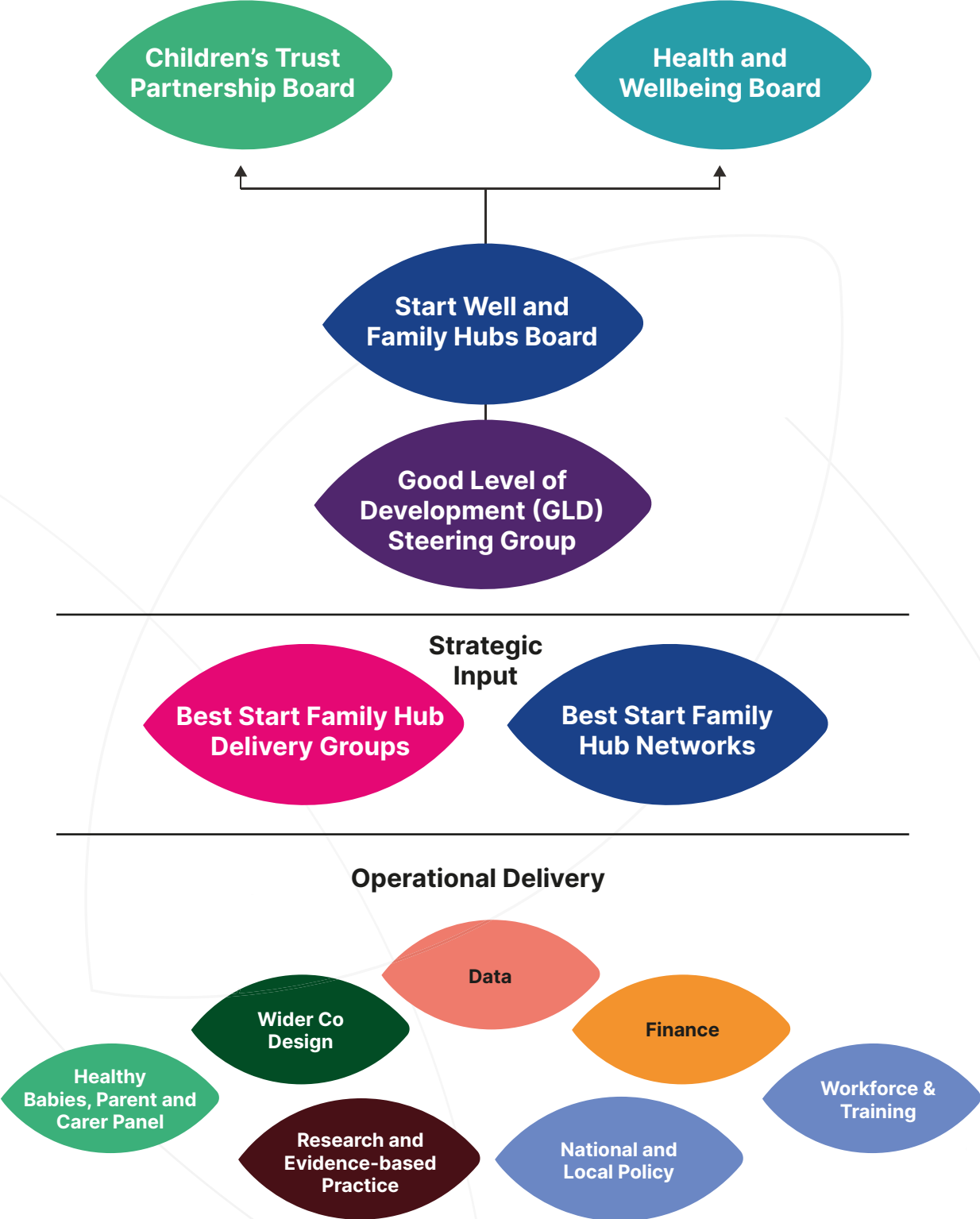
This plan will be managed through a well-established governance structure. Camden's Children Trust Partnership Board and Health & Wellbeing Board will ensure there is strategic join up between the commitments outlined in this plan and its delivery.

Leadership of the plan sits within Camden's Start Well and Best Start Family Hubs Board, which brings together colleagues from across the Council, NHS and VCS partners. A dedicated steering group and action plan have been created to oversee a multi-agency approach to reaching Camden's GLD targets. Named delivery leads work with partners to achieve good progress and evaluate impact of services.

Camden is also accountable to the Department for Education (DfE) for delivery of the Family Hubs and Healthy Babies programme. Monitoring data and financial returns are submitted to ensure there is external oversight of progress and effective budget management.



Governance Structure



 **BEST**
 **START**
 **IN LIFE**

