



Sutton LSCP
Local Safeguarding
Children Partnership



Sutton's Best Start in Life Plan

2026 – 2028

Our vision is for every child to be able to grow up in a loving, supportive community and to thrive.

To achieve this goal, it is not enough to address the challenges families face in isolation, such as parental mental health, unemployment, housing insecurity, or relationship breakdown, nor to focus narrowly on the child or a single outcome such as school attainment.

We must respond to the **complexity** in family life, where challenges intersect and compound. This means working with the **whole family**, valuing the important relationships around each child, and providing **proactive, tailored** support to families experiencing inequality in Sutton.

We are proud of the progress we have made in the last 3 years in establishing early support grounded on building relationships (outlined in our [Helping Early Strategy 2023 – 2028](#)), family hubs that engage our ethnically diverse community, and jointly invested parenting programmes, all of which have increased our universal offer for families across the borough. Now, we are ready to go further.

We have two goals towards our vision to see children and families thrive in Sutton:

1. **To strengthen and evolve our universal offer**, particularly by embedding 'think-family' approaches and expanding access to evidence-based parenting support.
2. **To proactively identify, engage, and support families who may be at risk of adversity**, using insight to recognise early indicators and provide tailored, relational support that addresses the conditions they face.

We believe that this will reduce the inequalities that some families face, it will improve the effectiveness of support for families facing adversity and increase the impact of universal early years support from pre-birth to 5 across the borough.

Throughout this plan, we set out both the work we will strengthen and the new approaches we will develop to deliver on these ambitions, which have a particular focus on our proactive, tailored support for families who need it most.



Population

As of [mid-2024](#), Sutton was home to 14,424 children aged five and under. This age group makes up 7% of Sutton's total population, comparable to London and England.

Age

Sutton's cohort of children in this group has a distinct age profile, with a higher proportion of children aged 4 and 5 years (37%) compared to both London (33%) and England averages (35%). This suggests that families frequently move into the borough as their children reach school age, reflecting the borough's reputation for good schools.

Ethnicity

As of 2021, 50% of children in Sutton under the age of five were from ethnically diverse communities, a greater proportion than the rest of the Sutton population.

Encouragingly, our Family Hub early years services are reaching a broadly representative group of families, with 45% of those engaging coming from ethnically diverse communities.

Language

In Sutton, 1 in 5 households with children have no adults who speak English as their main language, which can impact families' ability to access services in the borough. After English, the most commonly spoken languages are Tamil, Polish, Urdu, Bulgarian, and Romanian. Children who speak English as an additional language are three times as likely not to take up their full pre-school funding.

Migration

Families with children aged five and under are particularly mobile in Sutton, with a churn rate of around 10%. Over the past three years, an average of 400 children aged 5 and under have moved into Sutton each year from around the world - equal to 3% of the population - with few leaving. This is alongside a large internal flux. Around 1,000 children aged 5 and under move into the borough from elsewhere in the UK each year, with a similar number moving out.

Living Conditions

Poverty

1 in 4 children are estimated to live in poverty, approximately 3,600 0 - 5 year olds in Sutton. Most of these children will have at least one working parent. 1 in 7 children (2,200 0 - 5 year olds), may experience deep material deprivation, meaning that they are lacking multiple essentials like heating, fresh fruit and vegetables and a winter coat.

Temporary Accommodation

Nearly 500 children aged 0 - 5 live in temporary accommodation either in Sutton or in neighbouring boroughs. These children are at higher risk of missing out on services, are less likely to meet developmental milestones and more likely to experience socio-emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Good Level of Development

Overall, children in Sutton do well and start school ready to learn. In 24/25, 69.5% of children achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD). This is just above the national average; however, only 48.7% of children who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieved a GLD. There has been no significant change in the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at five years over the last four academic years.

While 83% of toddlers in Sutton achieve a good level of development at age 2 to 2 and a half years, comparable to the national average and exceeding the London average, longitudinal data show a downward trend. (ASQ). Data shows that whilst the expected level of development continues to be reached in communication skills (87.5%), there is a decline in the numbers of children reaching the expected level of development in all other areas, with the largest decrease being seen in personal social skills.

Evidence of what works

The [Helping Early Strategy](#) sets out the evidence base underpinning our work in Sutton, including the impact of early intervention on long-term family outcomes, the role of services in **addressing inequalities**, and the effectiveness of **parenting programmes** and **proportionate universalism**; providing support for all, while tailoring it to those with the greatest need.

Building on this, our Best Start in Life Plan draws on further evidence to strengthen our universal offer with a focus on **'think-family'** approaches, and also in understanding and responding to the **complexity** of multiple and interacting vulnerabilities, shaping more **tailored** outreach, and supporting families who face **adversity**.

Parenting support when experiencing adversity

The [Foundation's systematic review](#) of parenting interventions for families experiencing multiple and complex needs finds strong evidence that these programmes can improve both parenting and child outcomes, including parenting behaviour, parent-child relationships, child wellbeing, and reductions in behavioural difficulties. Drawing on over 100 rigorous studies, including randomised controlled trials, the review highlights that effective interventions often share common elements - particularly those grounded in behavioural (social learning) approaches, and can be effective across different delivery models and family contexts. However, parenting programmes alone are not sufficient to address wider issues such as parental mental health, reinforcing the need for coordinated, multi-agency support. Qualitative evidence further emphasises that engagement and impact are strongest where support is relational, flexible, culturally responsive, and tailored to the complex realities families face, with skilled practitioners and joined-up services playing a critical role in success ([Interventions for parents experiencing multiple and complex needs - Foundations](#))

Responding to the complexity of vulnerabilities

[Evidence](#) collated by Public Health England in 2020 emphasises that children's outcomes are shaped by a combination of individual, family, and wider social factors. It highlights that vulnerability is dynamic and influenced by the interaction of risk and protective factors across the life course, with strong evidence that early adversity can lead to poorer long-term health, well-being, and social outcomes.

It stresses the importance of whole-system, multi-agency action, alongside strengthening protective factors such as stable relationships, supportive families, and connected communities.

The impact of including and excluding Fathers/male carers

[Learning from Serious Case reviews](#) consistently shows that fathers have been marginalised, describing them as ignored, ‘invisible’ to practitioners or ‘the ghost in the equation’. Because generally the mother is the parent who is seen much more frequently by practitioners, the reviews concluded that too often there had been insufficient focus on the father of the baby, the father’s own needs and his role in the family.

Studies find that father involvement in the early years is associated with [improved cognitive development](#), language skills, and educational attainment, as well as better [social and emotional outcomes](#). Longitudinal evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort Study shows that early paternal engagement is linked to a reduced risk of behavioural difficulties in children from age three onwards. Systematic reviews of parenting interventions further highlight that including fathers can enhance programme effectiveness and deliver wider benefits across the whole family, including [improved parental relationships and wellbeing](#).



Goal 1: To strengthen and evolve our universal offer, particularly by embedding 'Think-family' approaches and expanding access to evidence-based parenting support.

The changes we aim to see for families through strengthening our universal offer:

- **More families will benefit from evidence-based parenting support from pre-birth through to when their child is 5 years old.**
- **Fathers and male carers feel recognised, valued, and confident in their parenting role**
- **More parents are able to volunteer, co-deliver programmes and input into service development**

Our existing universal offer:

Sutton currently operates four designated Family Hubs, which act as a "one-stop shop" for families, integrating various services.

- **Locations:**
 - Wallington Family Hub (Phoenix Leisure Centre).
 - Carshalton Family Hub (Tweeddale Children's Centre).
 - Cheam & South Sutton Family Hub (Green Oak/Shanklin).
 - Central Sutton Family Hub (Sutton Library)

Our Family Hubs facilitate access to a range of service and support for families, including play and child development opportunities, parenting support, welfare support, including free uniform shops and food vouchers, onsite delivery of developmental reviews, infant feeding and more.

The move of family hub services to a locality model in Sutton supported the service to see a 48% increase in families from the most deprived areas accessing the service

Parenting Support



Parenting Support is an area that has grown substantially over the last 4 years, starting from a place of referral only parenting programmes delivered by targeted early help and family workers in children's social care to a broad universal and targeted evidence-based parenting offer, that includes peer-led parenting programmes, programmes delivered across our system and ensuring parents can self-refer, sat within our family hubs. We currently deliver;

- Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities (EPEC): A peer-led model where local parents are trained to run groups for other parents. This is currently running successfully, but is primarily focused on older children (5+)
- Circle of Security Parenting (COSP): An evidence-based intervention for parents coping with adversity, focusing on attachment. This is delivered in Family Hubs in partnership with Home-Start.
- Togetherness, offering online bite-sized emotional health programmes for parents.
- Elklan 'Let's Talk' programme via Speech and Language Teams
- Early Bird parent programme for autism support via Playwise & Portage service for under 3's.

The Sutton Early Years system includes valuable input from:

Health Services

- Midwifery
- Health Visiting
- General Practitioners (GPs)
- Community Paediatricians
- Children's therapies, including Speech and Language

Early Education & Childcare

- Nurseries, Pre-schools and School Nurseries
- Childminders
- Early Years Advisors and SENCOs

Family Support

- Portage & Playwise (Portage)
- Family Hub Services
- Children's Social Workers
- Specialist Support Workers
- Home-Start
- Education Well-being Service
- Cranstoun Inspire



Community Services

- Rhyme Time and Library Services
- Birth Registrars
- Housing Support
- Community Voluntary and Faith Sector organisations

Our Strategic Plan

1. The universal work that we will **deliver and strengthen**

Delivery	
Expanding existing parenting programmes	<p>Expansion of peer-led support through Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities (EPEC) Being a Parent Programme to cover the early years (0-5) cohort.</p> <p>Continued delivery of Circle of Security parenting group in partnership with Home-Start</p> <p>Wider access to Togetherness (Solihull Approach) online courses for emotional health support.</p>
Commissioning new programmes to promote Play and Development	<p>PEEP Learning Together programme delivered by Family Hubs and community and voluntary groups</p> <p>EasyPeesy digital app to support home learning - gives simple, accessible advice and information to parents</p> <p>Early Talk Boost - Training for Early Years professionals working in early years settings and Childminders</p> <p>Elklan Let's Talk - Speech and language intervention for parents and children.</p> <p>Integration of home learning tips into routine interactions by all professionals (Midwives, Health Visitors, Early Years Practitioners/professionals and the Community Voluntary and Faith sector).</p>



<p>One plan for families</p>	<p>One Family Plan: Developing and embedding a "One Family Plan" in alignment with the "Families First" model across both universal and targeted early help services. This will allow families to transition between services without having to repeat their story and provide enough relevant information to new services to provide the right support at the right time.</p>
<p>Early Years Communication</p>	<p>Implementation of Early Talk Boost and other communication-focused interventions in early years settings and Family Hubs</p> <p>After a successful pilot run in 2025-2026, roll out Verbo, the Speech and Language tool, across Early Years Providers and schools to help providers identify potential concerns, set targets and put in place strategies to support, prior to speech and language referrals being made.</p>
<p>Mechanisms</p>	
<p>Workforce development</p>	<p>Standardised training on the "Home Learning Environment" for all practitioners</p> <p>A borough-wide campaign highlighting the value and professional nature of Early Years roles to attract new entrants.</p>
<p>Strengthening protocols</p>	<p>Adopting a "Think Family" protocol where services explicitly inquire about and engage fathers/partners, rather than focusing solely on the mother.</p>
<p>Best Start Branding</p>	<p>Consolidating existing brands and standardising signposting so that families receive consistent messaging regardless of where they enter the system</p>



Parent Panels	Expand the Parent Panel membership to ensure that parents' views are present in decision-making forums, including steering groups
System-Wide Feedback	Developing a unified mechanism for collating feedback across <i>all</i> early help services
Information packs	Parent co-developed information packs for all expectant parents about the universal Best Start Offer, which includes digital support.
Workforce development	<p>Named Special Educational Need and Disability practitioner to be in each Family Hub.</p> <p>Training for practitioners to identify speech delays accurately and early across the Early Years Sector.</p>
Developing a shared outcomes framework	Building on existing service outcomes and incorporating frameworks such as the Local Outcomes Framework and the Family Hub Outcomes Framework, to create a unified framework to monitor service delivery and performance across the system

Goal 2: To proactively identify, engage, and support families who may be at risk of adversity

The changes we would expect to see for families by developing new ways of working would be:

- **Stronger, more trusting relationships between families and services, through earlier outreach and engagement in shaping services**
- **Fewer children and families ‘missing’ from services, with improved identification, engagement, and sustained contact**
- **A narrowing of the attainment gap, with more children eligible for Free School Meals achieving a Good Level of Development**
- **More children with speech and language needs are identified early and supported, reducing the number starting Reception without appropriate support in place**
- **Building on existing data strengths ensures services can adapt even more effectively to what families tell us they need**

There will be challenges along the way, for example, while a range of services exist to support families, they are often accessed only at the point of referral, once needs have escalated. Our pathways have largely been shaped by presenting need, rather than proactively preventing challenges and reducing inequality.

Our strengths are securely sited in our Family Hubs that are set up in a way that provides flexible, relational, informal support; our outreach workers across the system who are now connected and delivering joint work and our data analysis, development of statistical vulnerabilities and entry points across the system that can be used for proactive outreach.

As a system, we will:

- Use our data capability to identify families
- Work with families to tailor service design and delivery
- Develop specific pathways for enhanced, proactive multi-agency support
- Develop a tiered outcomes framework to aid service planning and delivery across the whole system



This work will be based on two assumptions:

- Through earlier engagement with families facing adversity, we will grow more trusting and relational work together, which will support long-lasting improved outcomes for families in the borough
- Families will engage with tailored outreach, and it will prevent needs from escalating as a result

Our Strategic Plan

2. The new work we will develop for proactive, tailored support:

Delivery	
Pathways to support	<p>Implementation of specific support pathways for statistically vulnerable families, such as those in temporary accommodation, young parents or children with a social worker.</p> <p>Clear pathway between services with improved information sharing protocols, for example, between Midwifery, Health Visiting and Family Hubs.</p>
Tailored outreach	Tailored outreach pilots (e.g. joint visits by Community Nursery Nurses and Early Years Practitioners) to families who do not attend appointments or take up Early Learning for 2-year-olds.
Digital Family Hub	Parents ensure the digital family hub is accessible to Sutton's changing population, including incorporating language selection options.
Mechanisms	
Workforce development	Named Special Educational Need and Disability practitioner to be in each Family Hub.



	Training for practitioners to identify speech delays accurately and early across the Early Years Sector.
Tailored outreach	Tailored outreach pilots (e.g. joint visits by Community Nursery Nurses and Early Years Practitioners) to families who do not attend appointments or take up Early Learning for 2-year-olds.
New definition	Creation of a localised definition of statistical vulnerability to identify those children and families who, due to circumstances, may require additional information, advice and support to meet their expected level of development, above and beyond existing services
Targeted dataset sharing	Systematically linking datasets (e.g., from Health Visiting, Early Years, Social care and Education) to proactively identify "statistically vulnerable" children
Data analysis & insights	Conducting analysis on potential intervention points, such as identifying children who have missed their 1-year or 2-year development reviews, or identifying those eligible for the Healthy Start scheme or 2 year old funding, who are not claiming it.

Measuring our progress

Targets and Proxy measures:

We will use a tiered outcomes framework to track progress towards our goals, using a mixture of strategic goals such as the annual percentage of 2 - 2.5 year olds achieving a good level of development, and locally agreed operational goals. These operational goals will incorporate elements such as:

- % of families taking up early learning for two-year-olds funding, working families funding and 3-4 year old funding.
- % of eligible families registered and accessing the Healthy Start Card scheme and vitamins
- % of 3 - 3.5 year olds seen by a service or setting where development markers are assessed
- % of 2-year-olds who are not accessing services, who have engaged with targeted outreach
- % of early years partners participating in joint training annually.

Operational goals will be supported by a regular data analysis to review the reach and participation within Best Start in Life services.

Our Target is that by 2028, 78.2% of Children achieve a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception, with 58.6% of children eligible for Free School Meals also achieving a Good Level of Development.

How we will be accountable:

The Helping Early Board will continue to provide governance and assurance to our priorities as part of Best Start in life. The Board is made up of partners from Public Health, Children's Social Care, Education, Community, Faith and Voluntary sector, Health (0-19 Service and ICB), Housing, Commissioning and Schools.

1. The Terms of Reference will be reviewed in April 2026 to ensure Best Start is an integral part of the Board and targets for Best Start are reviewed regularly.
2. A full review of all governance boards for children will take place by July 2026 to ensure alignment of multiple priorities and plans across the sector.

