



Nottingham City Best Start Strategy 2025-2035



**Nottingham
City Council**

Foreword

Health and Wellbeing Board Chair:
Councillor Kalsi

I am proud to introduce our 2025-2035 Nottingham City Best Start Strategy which focuses on children 0-5, including pregnancy, and has been put together collaboratively with people across Nottingham who help to raise our 0-5s.

The first few years of a child's life have been proven to be a golden opportunity to give them the best start. Making sure that every child has the best possible start in life is one of our biggest priorities in Nottingham. We understand the critical importance of what happens during pregnancy and throughout those first five years, and the huge impact they have on children's lifelong health, happiness, success and wellbeing, and that having the best possible start helps children to have the best possible life.

Nottingham is a city that is rich in culture, diversity and history, but we also know that many of our children experience poverty and face unfair differences in health. Through collaboration with our partners across Nottingham, including parents, caregivers, professionals and children, we have identified five key priorities for our Best Start Strategy. We will focus on the building blocks of health, the right support during pregnancy and birth, strong relationships, and safe and positive home learning environments to ensure that all of our children don't just survive, but they have the chance to thrive!

We know that it takes a village to raise a child. Children are raised not only by their parents and caregivers, but also by their communities.

As a city, we will improve outcomes for our children together, making sure that Nottingham is a great place to be born and grow up.



Foreword

Parent in Nottingham:
Farzana Akhter

As a parent of young and adult children, I know how important the early years are. They are full of tired nights, proud little moments and questions without easy answers. There is no guidebook. But every day, we try our best. We learn as we go and do everything we can to help our children grow into confident, happy and healthy people.

The Best Start Strategy speaks to every parent, carer and anyone who has ever held a child's hand and thought, "I just want the best for you." It reflects a hope we all share. Every child, no matter who they are and where they come from they should be cared for, supported and valued.

Research and real-life experience show that the early years of childhood are very important. During this time, children's brains grow quickly, and simple things like play, talking, love and care can help shape their future. What we do now helps children understand who they are and how they fit into the world.

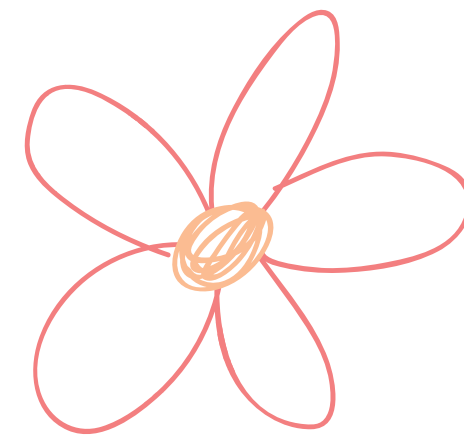
The environment around our children also matters. It's important that they can access clean and green spaces, have the resources they need, safe homes and strong relationships. This helps children think, feel and connect better. It's also important that they are supported by people who have the tools needed to help them learn and grow as best

they can. When we invest in these priorities, we support healthier families and build stronger communities.

As parents, we want the best for our children. By working together, we can give every child in Nottingham the best possible start in life.

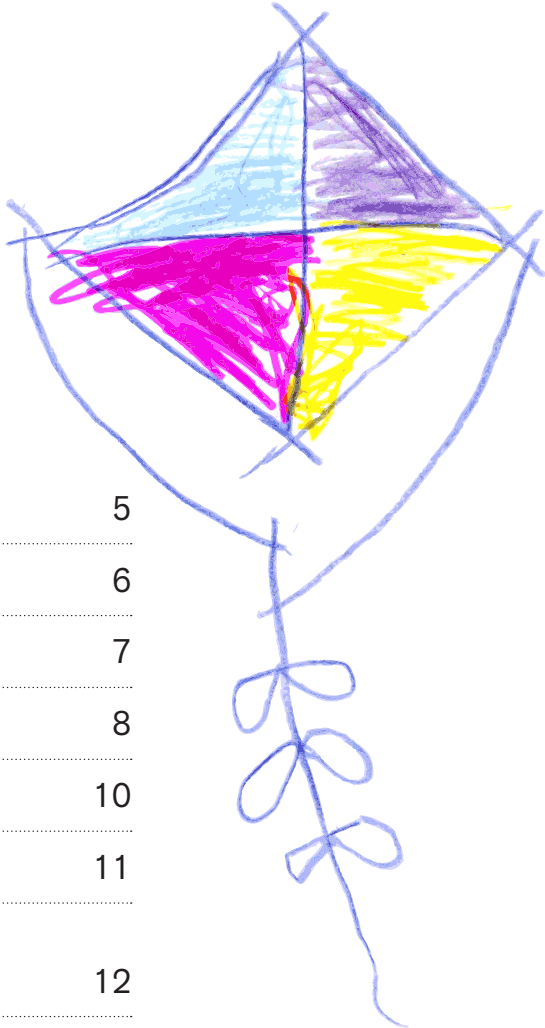


The Best Start Strategy speaks to every parent, carer and anyone who has ever held a child's hand and thought, "I just want the best for you."



Contents

Glossary	5
0-5 Roadmap	6
Introduction	7
Background	8
Strategy Development	10
Our Best Start Vision and Principles	11
Supporting Children and Families with Additional Needs and Complex Barriers	12
Our Priorities and Commitments	13
Priority 1 – Foundations for a Healthier Future: Reducing Unfair Differences	14
Priority 2 - Healthy Beginnings: Pre-conception, Pregnancy and Parenthood	15
Priority 3 - Healthy Relationships: Nurturing Positive Connections from Birth	16
Priority 4 - Growing up Safe: Protecting Babies, Infants and Children Together	17
Priority 5 - Big Little Moments: Chat Play Read	18
Delivering Our Strategy	19
Governance	20
Measuring Our Success	21
Logic Model	22

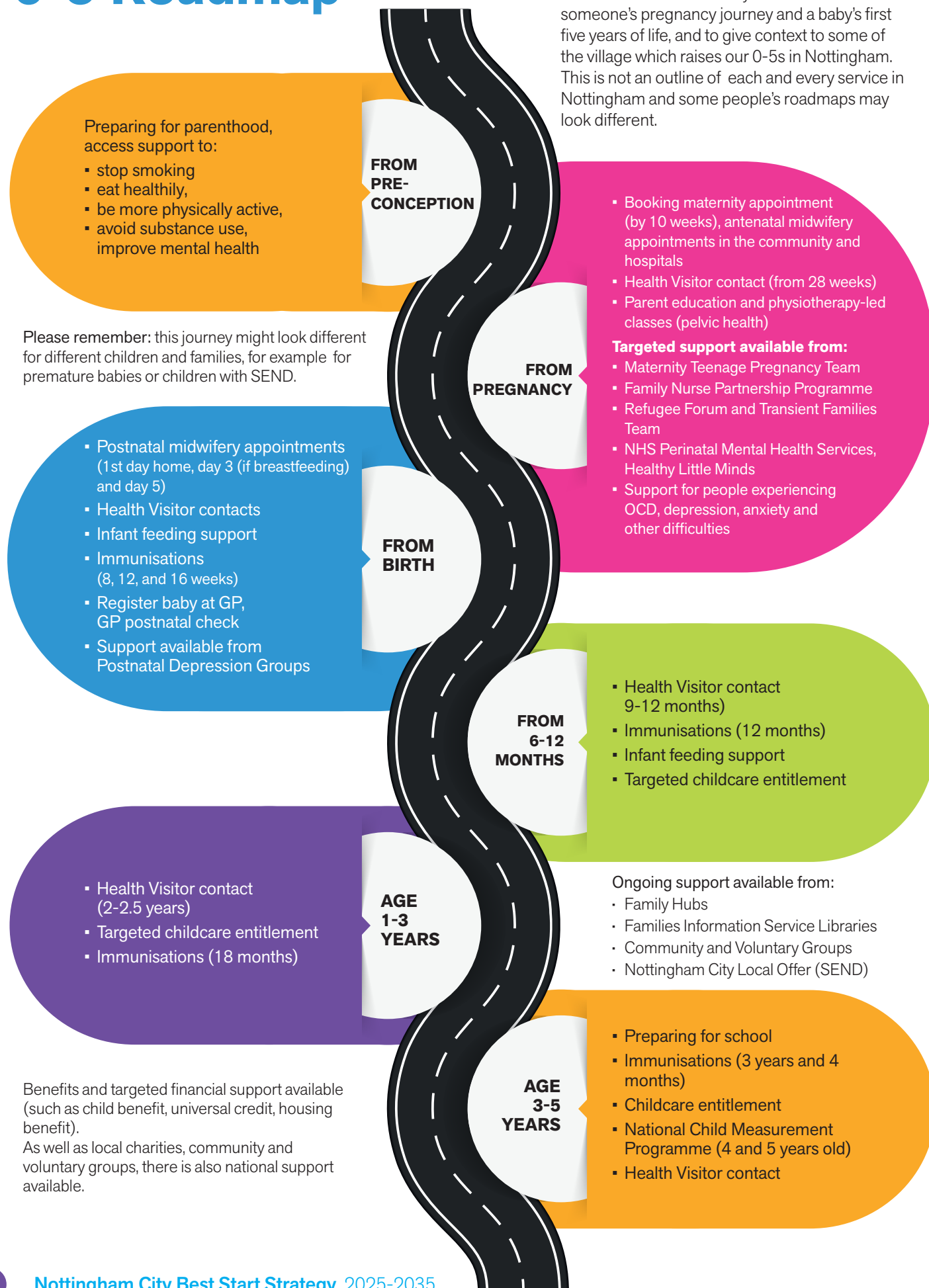


Glossary

Term	Definition in this Strategy
Adverse Childhood Experiences	Potentially traumatic events that occur during childhood (0-17 years) and can have lasting effects on a person's health, well-being, and development.
Baby / Infant / Child / Childhood	Baby: a child recently born, up to the age of 1 Infant: a child between the ages of 1 and 2 Child/childhood: child between 0-5
Best Start	The period from pre-conception to age five, where strong foundations for lifelong health, wellbeing, and development are established.
Caregivers / Primary Caregiver	Any adult responsible for the daily care of a child, including parents, grandparents, foster carers, and others in parenting roles. A primary caregiver is the adult who cares for the child most often, who is responsible for the child.
Co-Production	An approach where professionals and families work in equal partnership to design and deliver services.
Community Voices	Input and perspectives from local people, especially children and families, used to inform strategy and service design.
Corporate Parent	An organisation, usually a local authority, with a responsibility to provide for the needs of looked-after children, young people, and care leavers.
Health Inequalities	Unfair and avoidable differences in health between different groups of people, often linked to social, economic, or racial factors.
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
School Readiness	Children being developmentally ready to access the learning and development opportunities available to them in Reception.
System Partners	Organizations and services that work together to deliver the Best Start vision, e.g., health, local authority, early education, and the voluntary sector.
Targeted/tiered Support	Additional help or interventions provided to children and children and families who need more support, building on the universal offer.
Universal	Service/offer/support/framework made available to all children and families, regardless of need.
Wellbeing	A person's physical, emotional, and social connections and happiness.

0-5 Roadmap

The purpose of this roadmap is to provide context for some of the key services involved in someone's pregnancy journey and a baby's first five years of life, and to give context to some of the village which raises our 0-5s in Nottingham. This is not an outline of each and every service in Nottingham and some people's roadmaps may look different.



Introduction

What do we mean by 'Best Start'?

Every child deserves the best start in life. By Best Start, we mean the critical period from pre-conception to age five. This period lays the foundations for their lifelong health, learning and wellbeing. A child's development during these early years from age 0-5 is rapid and complex, and is strongly influenced by their environment, relationships and access to services.

Every child's and family's journeys are different. In Nottingham City, not every child has an equal start. Too many children and families face avoidable barriers which negatively impact their health, from poverty and housing insecurity to racial inequality, poor maternal mental health, and limited access to local support.

This Nottingham City Best Start Strategy is our shared plan to overcome these barriers. It describes our vision, priorities and commitments about how we will work together to ensure that every child has the best possible foundations for the rest of their life.

Who are 'we', and who is the strategy for?

As the saying goes, "it takes a village to raise a child". Giving every child in Nottingham the best start isn't the responsibility of families and caregivers alone, but of everyone in this 'village'. This 'village' is also known as the 'early years system', and includes everyone from sexual health and primary care services, to maternity services, health visiting, education, and the community and voluntary sector, as well as parents, caregivers and families themselves. 'We' in this document refers to everyone in this system, and this system has created the Best Start Strategy with the Nottingham City Council Public Health Team.

The strategy is for all 0-5s in Nottingham. We understand though that all babies, infants and children are unique and that their caregivers and families are unique too. The plans which will deliver our strategy commitments will ensure that we are meeting the needs of the children and caregivers who face the biggest barriers in all circumstances.



Background

Why is this strategy important?

Giving every child the best start in life is widely recognised as the most effective way to improve long-term health, education and social outcomes. This includes better performance (and thriving) at school, better social and emotional development, improved work outcomes, higher income and better lifelong health, including longer life expectancy.

The Nottingham City Best Start Strategy is closely aligned with national priorities, including the following key frameworks and programmes:

- **The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days** sets out the government's ambition to improve support in the period from conception to age two, with a particular focus on maternal mental health, infant health, and strong attachment.
- **The Start for Life Offer**, delivered through Family Hubs, is about creating welcoming spaces where families and children aged 0-19 can access joined-up support, with a renewed emphasis on relationship-based practice and reducing inequalities.
- **The Healthy Child Programme (0-5 years)** Provides the universal framework for public health services delivered by health visitors and early years professionals.
- **The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework** sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to five.

This national direction reflects findings from the Marmot Review which emphasised, *"What happens during the early years (starting in the womb) has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and wellbeing – from obesity, heart disease and mental health, to educational achievement and economic status"*¹.



Despite the evidence, inequalities in early childhood remain deeply rooted:

- Infant mortality rates in the most disadvantaged areas of England are more than double those in the least disadvantaged areas.
- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds can start school up to 5 months behind their peers in language and communication.
- Children living in the most deprived areas are over three times more likely to experience multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by age five than those in the least deprived areas.

¹ Marmot, M. (2010). *Fair Society, Healthy Lives* (The Marmot Review).

Why is this strategy important for Nottingham?

Nottingham is a diverse and vibrant city, but one where too many children do not have the same start in life. Children and families from ethnic minority backgrounds, facing poverty, looked after children, and children and families who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) often encounter additional challenges in the early years system.



These challenges can become bigger because of complex social factors, and can significantly impact birth, a child's early development, and their health and social opportunities throughout the rest of their lives. Children in Nottingham face some significant health and development challenges. While the most recent rates of infant mortality (2021-23) are similar to those observed for England, they have been significantly higher for four of the last five years².

Fewer pregnant women access maternity services early while a higher proportion smoke during pregnancy³. Fewer children receive important vaccinations (e.g. MMR at 2 years) than other parts of England⁴. A higher proportion of children start primary school living with overweight or obesity, and more children have signs of tooth decay by the age of 5 years old⁵. These early inequalities go on to impact the school readiness and long-term wellbeing of our children and young people.

Beyond the statistics are the lived experiences of children and families. We have heard from families, carers, professionals, and children in Nottingham. We have heard how some families feel unable to focus on their health because they feel like they are "fighting fires" trying to keep their family safe, housed and fed. We also know that families are still feeling the impact of COVID-19; beyond growing issues such as food poverty, this includes the social and emotional development of children.

Importantly, we also know what's possible when we work together. Through Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC), Nottingham has shown that strong partnerships, built around families and communities, can improve early communication (and interaction), strengthen parenting confidence, and help more children be ready to engage with learning. SSBC has demonstrated the power of evidence-informed, locally led approaches that combine universal support with targeted help for those who need it most. The Best Start Strategy builds on this learning. The strategy also connects and reinforces existing local commitments aligning with the priorities and direction of local plans:

- **Child Friendly Nottingham City**: this is Nottingham's commitment to becoming a city where the rights, voices and needs of children are prioritised in every decision we make.

- **Nottingham Early Help Strategy 2023-2025**: this strategy focuses on helping every child grow up to achieve their full potential through a strong early help partnership. It places an emphasis on listening to and working with children, young people and families.

- **Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Strategy**: support for children and young people is identified as a key priority - ensuring the building blocks of wellbeing are in place for all children, including a safe and warm home, close and supportive relationships and attachments in early life and beyond including access to a good education.

- **Nottingham City Council Strategic Plan (2025-2029)**: within its core mission to deliver for local people, the Council identifies the importance of ensuring every child has the best start in life, supporting them to thrive academically, emotionally, and physically while protecting the most vulnerable.

- **Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Nottingham (2022-2025)**: this strategy aims to improve health and reduce health inequalities across the city, and it recognises the importance of giving babies a better start in life to improve health through adulthood.

² OHID (2025). *Child Health Profiles: Infant mortality rate*.

³ OHID (2025). *Child Health Profiles: Pregnancy and birth*.

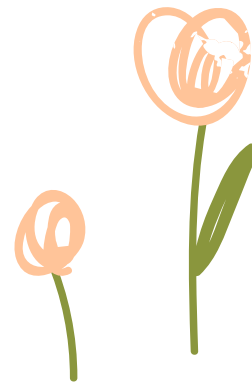
⁴ OHID (2025). *Child Health Profiles: Early Years*.

⁵ OHID (2025). *Child Health Profiles: Main indicators*.

Strategy Development

This strategy has been shaped by people who know best what our Nottingham babies, infants, children and families need.

The strategy development began with an early years system workshop, bringing together insight from a large number of people from across the system, including:



- Parents and caregivers, including those represented within the Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership,
 - Young children through creative, age-appropriate activities,
 - Members of our Best Start Collaborative and Early Help Partnership including representatives from education, health, and care services,
 - Professionals across the whole early years system in Nottingham, including maternity care, health visiting and education (including SEND) as well as the community and voluntary sector,
- Collectively we shared what we each wanted from a Best Start Strategy and working together, agreed on our most urgent and impactful priorities.

This insight, alongside local data and national evidence, has shaped the priorities, principles, and focus of this strategy. The voice of the child and family has been central to our approach throughout, including how the strategy is written.

Throughout the development of this strategy, we have regularly returned to the people who know best to make sure we have heard them and are going in the right direction, including (but not limited to):

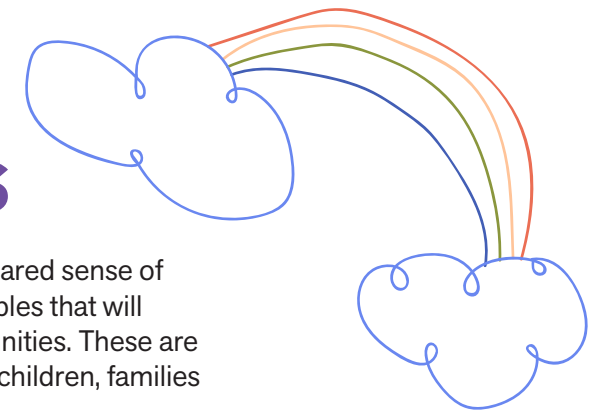
- Parents, caregivers and children in libraries during half term
- Members of the Maternal and Neonatal Voices Partnership
- Young children at Holiday Activities and Food Groups
- Our Local Maternity and Neonatal System Transformation Board
- Owners, leaders and managers working in Early Years settings
- Nottingham Child Friendly City collaborative



We are confident that together we have created a Best Start Strategy which is accessible, honest and clear, and which represents the views of the early years system and children and families in Nottingham city.

This strategy has been created for Nottingham City's residents, but we recognise that we share many parts of our early years system with Nottinghamshire County residents. We have the same vision for our 0-5s, and have a joined-up approach where the needs of our 0-5s and families are similar.

Our Best Start Vision & Principles



To give every child in Nottingham the best start in life, we need a shared sense of purpose. This strategy sets out a common vision and a set of principles that will guide how we work together: across services, settings, and communities. These are not just words on a page. They reflect the values and priorities that children, families and professionals have told us matter most.

Our vision statement:

Every child has the best start in life and parents-to-be, caregivers, babies, and young children have what they need to thrive. Families, communities, and services join together to make Nottingham and Nottinghamshire a great place to be born and grow up.

Our Principles:

The following principles will guide how we design, deliver and evaluate services and support for our young children and families. They apply to everyone from decision-makers to frontline workers and across all sectors involved in early childhood development.

Focus on mental health and race inequalities

- We have intentionally woven a strong focus on mental health and race equality through each priority. These are not standalone issues, they cut across all aspects of early childhood, shaping the support children and families receive and the outcomes children experience.

Support our 0-5s to thrive, not just survive

- All children deserve to grow up safe, healthy and happy. We want to create the conditions where every child (including those with SEND) can learn, play, develop strong relationships and reach their full potential, not just meet basic milestones.

Universal services with targeted and specialist support

- Support must be available to everyone in the right place at the right time, with targeted help for those who need it. All families and children should feel included and able to access services that are welcoming and understanding, including children with SEND, looked after children, families seeking asylum, refugees, families and

children from ethnic minority backgrounds and those facing poverty.

A child is never just a child on their own -

We want to improve outcomes for children, while recognising they are shaped by the people and environments around them. Our work must support everyone who looks after the child and respond to their wider needs.

Listen, co-produce, and value lived experience

- We will listen to and work with families at every stage. That includes working with parents, caregivers and, where possible, children themselves to understand how we can best meet their needs.

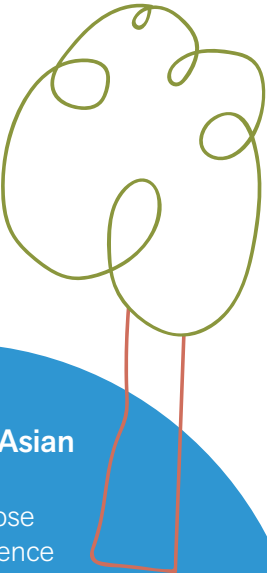
One system, working together – Parents and caregivers tell us they want joined-up services and system partners talked about their important role as corporate parents. We will strengthen relationships across the system and use them to grow the knowledge, confidence and wellbeing of the early years workforce.

Supporting children and families with additional needs and complex barriers

Not every family starts from the same place.

While this strategy is for all children aged 0–5 in Nottingham City, we recognise that some groups of children and families experience greater barriers to health, development and support. These barriers influence how they access services, how their children grow and learn, and how confident they feel navigating the system. To achieve our ambition of giving every child the best start, we must ensure our actions actively work to reduce these barriers.

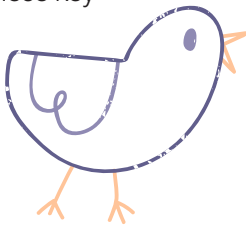
This means designing and delivering services that are accessible, culturally responsive, and tailored to the needs of children and families who may otherwise be left behind. In particular, our strategy recognises the importance of meeting the needs of the following key populations:



- **Children and families living in poverty** including those experiencing housing insecurity, food poverty or material hardship. The challenges they face often affect children's health and development from the very earliest stages of life.
- **Children and families from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds** including people seeking asylum and those newly arrived in the UK, who may experience racism, trauma or face barriers such as language and unfamiliarity with the system.
- **Inclusion health groups:** This includes children and families experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage, such as those facing unstable housing, social exclusion, or complex social needs.
- **Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)** who may require extra time, tailored communication and joined-up support across education, health and social care.



These groups do not exist in isolation. Many children and families face overlapping barriers and forms of disadvantage. Going forward, our delivery plans will set out the actions needed to support these communities, and our outcome framework will be developed to ensure we recognise any differing developmental needs. To ensure services and actions are shaped by the people most affected, we will continue to engage families including these key populations.



Our Priorities and Commitments

The five priorities in this strategy set out the essential ingredients for giving every child in Nottingham the best possible start in life. Each priority focuses on a key area where children and families benefit from strong, responsive support and where our system must work together more effectively.

Each priority includes a description of:

- What this means practically for infants and children in Nottingham
- What is the priority, and why does it matter for Nottingham?
- Our commitments to address the needs in Nottingham, using “We will...” statements
- The benefit to children, their caregivers, and system partners if we achieve our commitments.



Priority 1- Foundations for a Healthier Future: Reducing Unfair Differences

What this means practically for babies, infants and children in Nottingham City:

- “I will have a safe place to live and play”
- “I will be warm”
- “I will not feel sad or stressed about money”



What is the priority, and why does it matter for Nottingham?

“Unfair Differences” and “Health Inequalities” both refer to avoidable and unjust differences in health and wellbeing between different groups of people. These differences are shaped by the broader circumstances of people’s lives, which are called the ‘building blocks of health’. These building blocks include income, housing, education, access to green spaces, experiences of racism or discrimination, and access to resources and services.

Helping rebuild these building blocks in someone’s life can help to reduce health inequalities. Acting in the earliest years of life is the most effective time to do this, which is why reducing the unfair differences experienced by

children and families is a priority of the Best Start Strategy.

In Nottingham, families and professionals alike have described the challenges some children face in getting a fair start. Parents have spoken about how difficult it can be to make sure their families have safe, warm and secure housing and have all their basic needs met. Professionals have reflected that, when basic needs are not met, it becomes harder for families to focus on health. Children themselves have spoken about missing out on things, and the sadness and stress that can come from having little money.

These experiences are reflected in the local data:

- In the five years up to April 2023, households requesting homelessness support increased by 40% and families placed in temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfasts, increased by 231%⁶.
- As a Local Authority, Nottingham has the 12th highest percentage (38.8%) of children aged under 16 in relative low-income families out of all regions in the UK (2024)⁷.
- Foodbanks and community groups have told us about the increasing need for toothbrushes and toothpaste for young families, when in 2023/24, 28% of 5-year-olds experience visually obvious dental decay compared to the England average of 22.4% (2023/24)⁸.
- In March 2024, 39% of Nottingham residents completing the Nottingham Financial Resilience Partnership survey had reduced or skipped meals in the previous week because they did not have enough money for food⁹.

Our commitments:

Together, **we will...**

- Work together to ensure that all families can access the financial, childcare, and housing support they are entitled to.
- Advocate for system-wide recognition of how the ‘building blocks of health’ impact children’s health and wellbeing
- Support parents and caregivers to build positive home environments with the resources they need to promote wellbeing.

The benefit to children, their caregivers, and system partners if we achieve our commitments:

Families will feel more financially stable and secure to provide for their children and will know where to go for financial support and information. System partners will have more knowledge and awareness of the services available for families and will feel more confident having conversations with parents and caregivers about the building blocks of health.



⁶ Nottingham City Council (2024). *Homes fit for the future: Nottingham’s Housing Strategy 2024–2028*
⁷ Department for Work and Pensions (2024). *Children in low income families: local area statistics, financial year ending 2024*.
⁸ OHID (2025). *National Dental Epidemiology Programme (NDEP) for England: oral health survey of 5-year-old schoolchildren 2024*.
⁹ Nottingham Financial Resilience Partnership (2024). *Resident survey findings: food insecurity in Nottingham*.

Priority 2 - Healthy Beginnings: Pre-conception, Pregnancy and Parenthood

What this means practically for babies, infants and children in Nottingham City:

- “I will feel happy and healthy because I’m being looked after well”
- “The people who look after me will be happy because they are healthy and feel good”

What is the priority, and why does it matter for Nottingham?

A baby’s start in life is influenced heavily by the health of the person or people looking after them - starting before conception, continuing through pregnancy, and extending into early parenthood. Improving caregivers and parents’ health is an essential part of preparing for a healthy baby, alongside timely access to services and learning how to be a parent or caregiver. The earlier parents engage with services, such as antenatal appointments, the more opportunities there are for meaningful conversations and early intervention to improve health and wellbeing.

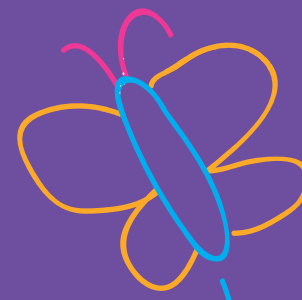
Despite this, we know that people from more deprived backgrounds and ethnic minority groups are more likely

to start antenatal care later, often due to cultural, financial and/or practical barriers. This is a contributor to ingrained health inequalities. Healthy beginnings and ensuring that everyone can get the right support at the right time is a priority in the Best Start Strategy as it offers the opportunity to reduce those inequalities early and benefit long-term health and development.

In Nottingham, we understand that some people, including both professionals and caregivers, feel that communication within and between services isn’t always the best it can be. We understand that this has an impact on people being able to access the right support as early as possible.

These experiences are reflected in the local data:

- In 2023, only 48.9% of pregnant people in Nottingham booked their antenatal appointment within the first 10 weeks, compared to a national average of 58.7%¹⁰.
- In 2023, 3.9% of babies had a low birthweight compared with 2.8% nationally¹¹.
- In 2022, 13% of mothers smoked at the time of delivery, compared with 9.1% nationally¹².
- In 2023/24, 54.6% of babies were breastfed at birth, compared with 65.7% nationally¹³.



Our commitments:

Together, **we will...**

- Provide the support people need to improve their health and wellbeing and have healthy pregnancies.
- Proactively connect every family, especially those facing significant challenges, with tailored, timely, and accessible support services that meet their specific requirements.
- Ensure that our services are doing everything they can to provide clear, coordinated and easy access routes to services for everyone.
- Help parents-to-be know what to expect and prepare for the mental and physical changes of parenthood.

The benefit to children, their caregivers, and system partners if we achieve our commitments:

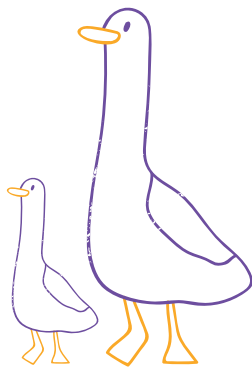
Parents and caregivers will be better prepared to care for our babies, infants and children, and families will feel more confident, in control and less anxious knowing who they can go to for support. System partners and services will be better equipped to engage with more people sooner and will have better communication within and between services.

¹⁰ NHS Digital (2024). *NHS Maternity Statistics, England 2023–24: Booking Appointments*.
¹¹ NHS Digital (2024). *NHS Maternity Statistics, England, 2023–24: Births*.
¹² OHID (2023). *Child Health Profile: Nottingham - Fingertips Public Health Profiles*.
¹³ NHS Digital (2024). *NHS Maternity Statistics, England, 2023–24*.

Priority 3 - Healthy Relationships: Nurturing Positive Connections from Birth

What this means practically for babies, infants and children in Nottingham City:

- “I will feel a strong connection with the people who look after me”
- “I will feel loved and safe”
- “I will grow up knowing how to have good relationships with my family and friends”



What is the priority, and why does it matter for Nottingham?

Positive, strong relationships are important for all of us to live longer, happier and healthier lives. For babies, who are entirely dependent on others, the most important and influential relationship is with their primary caregiver(s), such as their parent(s). These early bonds shape how a baby's brain develops and influences the rest of their lives. For example, their emotional, social and physical wellbeing, academic achievement and even employment in adulthood.

Babies, infants and children benefit from multiple strong positive relationships. Positive involvement from both parents or caregivers, including fathers and partners, is particularly protective. However, we know that many partners, especially fathers, often feel that they are not routinely included in their child's care. When both partners are supported to be involved, the health of the child and, by greater sharing of responsibilities, the wellbeing of the whole family is improved.

Relationships between caregivers and the professionals supporting them are just as important. The NHS recognises that continuity of care in maternity services is integral to improving maternity health outcomes, particularly for people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Likewise, effective communication and trust between professionals who look after 0-5s is key to supporting families holistically and ensuring no child is missed.

If it takes a village to raise a child, the village must be built on strong, positive relationships. This is why Healthy Relationships is a priority in our Best Start Strategy.

We have heard about the importance of relationships in all our conversations with parents, professionals and children in Nottingham. Many people highlighted the need to be better at including fathers and ensuring we place the voice of the babies, infants and children at the centre of everything we do and the decisions we make.

These experiences are reflected in the local data:

- Between September 2022 and April 2024 162 families were supported by our Nottingham Healthy Little Minds service, which families are referred to for help strengthening parent-infant relationships ¹⁴.
- In 2025, Care Quality Commission assessments of Nottingham University Hospitals found that staffing levels impacted patients' experiences of care from professionals ¹⁵.
- In 2020, 93 fathers engaged in a consultation commissioned by Small Steps Big Changes. Fathers expressed feeling lost, not understanding where to go for information and support and not feeling as involved. 90% said they had never been asked about their mental health and felt “viewed as people who will not play an important role in a child's life” ¹⁶.

Our commitments:

Together, we will...

- Promote positive parent-infant bonding and attachment.
- Ensure all families, including fathers and extended caregivers, feel included and supported.
- Build stronger relationships between families and professionals that foster trust and open communication.
- Strengthen connections between the people who care for and support 0-5s in Nottingham

The benefit to children, their caregivers, and system partners if we achieve our commitments:

Parents, caregivers and families will feel included by professionals and supported to have positive connections to build a strong relationship with their child. System partners will feel supported to prioritise relationships as a key element of care for children in Nottingham.

Priority 4 - Growing up Safe: Protecting Babies, Infants and Children Together

Please note: This priority includes mention of deaths during pregnancy, birth, infancy and childhood.

What this means practically for babies, infants and children in Nottingham City:

- “I will be safe at home”
- “I will be protected from things which could hurt me”
- “The people who look after me will know how to keep me safe, and they will be kept safe too”

What is the priority, and why does it matter for Nottingham?

Children rely on the adults around them to keep them safe from harm. Adults must make decisions on their behalf to prevent injury, illness, or emotional harm. Keeping children safe in the early years helps to protect them well into adulthood. This includes actions like ensuring safe home environments, preventing falls, and protecting children's emotional wellbeing. Vaccinations are another key part of this protection; helping to prevent serious diseases during infancy and beyond.

Safety starts before birth. High-quality, inclusive maternity care protects both babies and parents from preventable harm. It is an NHS priority to increase the overall quality and safety of maternity and neonatal services and reduce how many families experience devastating losses during this time. Too many babies in England are born preterm, smaller than expected, or stillborn due to avoidable socio-economic and

racial inequalities. The UK's maternal death rate has increased over the last 20 years. Women from Black ethnic backgrounds are over twice as likely to die in pregnancy or soon after than White women with increased mortality rates amongst women from Mixed and Asian backgrounds. Women living in the most disadvantaged areas of England experience mortality rates nearly twice as higher as those women living in the least disadvantaged areas.

In Nottingham, safety is also a clear priority for children and families. As part of our ambition to become a Child Friendly City, children voted “Safe and Secure” as one of their top priorities. Families and children have told us they want to feel safer at home, on the park and walking around Nottingham. Professionals in Nottingham have also raised concerns about the falling childhood vaccination rates in the city leaving more children vulnerable to preventable illness.

These experiences are reflected in the local data:

- While the most recent rates of infant mortality (2021-23) are similar to those observed for England, they have been significantly higher for four of the last five years ¹⁷. Infant mortality refers to the death of a child aged between 1 day and 1 year.
- In 2021, 26.8% of mothers giving birth within Nottingham Local Authority (LA) and 4.6% within the Nottinghamshire LA were from Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British population groups ¹⁸. In the same year, analysis of Serious Incident (SI) data from Nottingham University (NUH) indicates that 34% of SIs recorded at NUH were from Black, Asian, & Minority Ethnic Groups (47% were from White British and White other groups, 19% recorded as not stated).
- A&E attendances for 0-4s in 2023 was 832 per 1,000, compared with 798 per 1,000 in England ¹⁹.
- Across MMR, Hib/MenC, and diptheria, tetanus, polio, pertussis, and HepB, our vaccination rates range from 72% to 87.9%, compared with England's rates ranging from 82.7% and 91.9% in 2023/24 ²⁰. The World Health Organisation recommends 95% coverage of childhood immunisations to ensure herd immunity.

Our commitments:

Together, we will...

- Develop a system-wide response to infant mortality and unfair differences in pregnancy outcomes.
- Help parents and caregivers provide physically and emotionally safe home environments for their children.
- Protect children through accessible and trusted vaccination programmes.
- Advocate for babies', infants', children's and families' safety needs in the city.

The benefit to children, their caregivers, and system partners if we achieve our commitments:

Children will be safer and better protected from physical and emotional harm at home and around Nottingham, supporting their physical and mental health throughout childhood and into adulthood. Parents will experience safer maternity care, and the system will benefit from closer working relationships to reduce maternal and infant mortality.

¹⁴ Small Steps Big Changes (2024). Healthy Lifestyle Pathways Evaluation Interim Report – Healthy Little Minds.

¹⁵ Care Quality Commission (2025). CQC publishes reports on maternity services run by Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust.

¹⁶ Small Steps Big Changes (2020). Consultation with fathers – A Summary.

¹⁷ OHID (2025). Child Health Profiles: Infant mortality rate.

¹⁸ MBRRACE-UK (2023). MBRRACE-UK Perinatal Mortality Surveillance: Reference Tables for Births in 2021.

¹⁹ OHID (2025). A&E attendances (0–4 years), Nottingham - Fingertips Public Health Profile.

²⁰ NHS Digital (2024). Childhood Vaccination Coverage Statistics, England, 2023-24.



Priority 5 - Big Little Moments: Chat Play Read

What this means practically for babies, infants and children in Nottingham City:

- “I will learn lots and feel more ready for school”
- “I will enjoy learning and making new friends”
- “The people who look after me will enjoy playing and learning with me and having fun”

What is the priority, and why does it matter for Nottingham?

Children develop more rapidly between birth and age five than at any other time in life. These early years shape a child's future health, learning and potential including intellectually, emotionally and cognitively. Health and learning strongly influence each other. Children in good health are better able to learn, and those given opportunities for strong early development are more likely to lead healthier lives as they grow. Education is an important factor in breaking the cycle of health inequalities. By the time they start school, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are, on average, 4 months behind their peers.

In these early years of a child's life, their parents and caregivers will be their first teachers, and their home their first classroom. This is often called the ‘home learning environment’. Supporting parents and caregivers to feel confident in encouraging learning benefits both children and families. Communication and language development

is fundamental during this time, it lays the foundation for all future thinking and learning. Interacting through singing, talking, playing, reading and having fun together are all essential in creating positive early learning experiences and setting children up for happy, healthy, successful lives.

Children and families have told us how much they enjoy opportunities to learn and experience new things in Nottingham with children selecting “Education and Learning” as one of our Nottingham Child Friendly Cities badges. Parents have told us that it can be difficult to understand how they are expected to best support their child's development. Professionals in Nottingham raised the importance of early learning as a fundamental part of a good start in life, but they felt growing challenges meant more children are starting school without all of the skills and experiences they need to thrive.

These experiences are reflected in the local data:

- In the 2023-24 Early Years Foundation Stage profiles, 63.2% of Nottingham children achieved a good level of development compared to the national average of 67.2%²¹.
- Lowest areas of achievement in 2023-24 were in Word Reading, Writing, and Numerical Patterns. 71.9% of girls and 55.% of boys achieved a good level of development in Nottingham²².

Our commitments:

Together, **we will**...

- Support parents and caregivers as the child's first educator, encouraging positive early learning experiences and creating a positive home learning environment.
- Strengthen opportunities that celebrate the importance of early connections, reading and playing to aid physical, cognitive, and emotional growth.
- Support early communication and language development by encouraging early conversational interactions and embedding a system-wide appreciation of how we build a strong foundation for lifelong communication.

The benefit to children, their caregivers, and system partners if we achieve our commitments:

Families, parents and caregivers will feel more confident to develop positive learning environments at home, and children will be better prepared when they start school to succeed academically by reaching their full potential (including those children with SEND) and be healthier and happier. System partners will feel more confident and committed in encouraging conversational interactions for children as early as possible.

Delivering our Strategy

To ensure this strategy leads to meaningful action and measurable impact, every 3 years a detailed delivery plan will be co-produced with system partners across Nottingham City. This delivery plan will set out how we will work together to implement the commitments and priorities outlined across the five strategic priorities.



The delivery plan will:

- **Focus on meeting the needs of all of our 0-5s and families, including our children and families with additional needs and complex barriers**
We will work with the early years system (families, caregivers, professionals, volunteers) to ensure that our plans meet the specific needs of all of our 0-5s and families, including SEND, people seeking asylum and refugee status, ethnic minorities and those living in poverty.
- **Translate strategic priorities into tangible actions**
Clear actions will be identified for each “We Will” statement, with responsibilities assigned to appropriate organisations and partnerships across the system.
- **Identify timelines and sequencing**
We will outline when activities start, key milestones, and balance actions that build momentum while also laying the groundwork for longer-term change.
- **Align resources and partnership contributions**
Our plans are ambitious but need to be realistic. While the strategy does not depend on new or additional funding, it creates a framework to align current and future investments around shared priorities.
- **Embed coproduction and lived experience**
We will involve parents, caregivers, families, frontline practitioners and community voices in the development and review of the delivery plan, to ensure it is grounded in real experiences and priorities.
- **Include a robust performance and monitoring framework**

The delivery plan will include measurable indicators of progress to help monitor progress and adjust course where necessary. Alongside other Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities, indicators will be included in an outcome's framework monitored by the Joint Health and Wellbeing Board.

This delivery plan will be developed collaboratively with partners from across the health and care system. It will be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains responsive to emerging need and insights.

Governance

The delivery of Nottingham City's Best Start Strategy will be overseen by the Best Start Collaborative which will bring together senior leaders from across the local authority, health services, early years providers, voluntary and community sector organisations, and parent /caregiver representatives. Through the Nottingham City Place Based Partnership, progress on the strategy will be shared with the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Where priorities within the strategy are shared across Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County, we will identify existing groups or create working groups to deliver change.

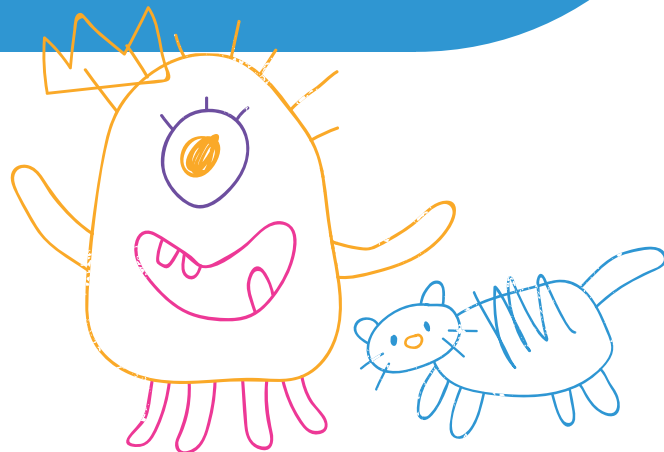
Accountability to children and families

We are committed to making this strategy meaningful and accountable to the children and families it is designed to support. Parents, caregivers and children have been actively involved in shaping the development of this strategy, and they will remain central to its implementation.

This includes:

- **Ongoing Engagement** with local parents and caregivers through existing forums, focus groups, and community organisations.
- **Representation** of parents and caregivers on the Best Start Collaborative.
- **Feedback Loops** built into service delivery, ensuring parents, caregivers and families can share their experiences and influence improvements.
- **Transparent Reporting** on progress against the strategy and our commitments.

We recognise that building trust and responsiveness takes time and consistency. Our ambition is to create a system where parents, caregivers and families feel genuinely heard, respected, and empowered.



Measuring our success

The Nottingham City Best Start Strategy is designed to deliver long-term, measurable improvements in the lives of babies, infants, children, and their parents, caregivers and families. Our delivery plans will help tie the actions we take now and have planned, with several key, long-term measures of success.

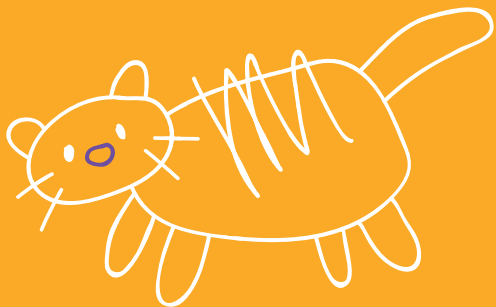
Increased School Readiness: We want to see more Nottingham City children reaching expected levels of development at age 2 and at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly in communication and language, personal and social development, and physical development.

Improved Baby, Infant and Child Health: We want to continue to bring down infant mortality and improve birth outcomes as well as improving the health issues that impact our children in Nottingham e.g. the proportion of reception aged children who are overweight or obese.

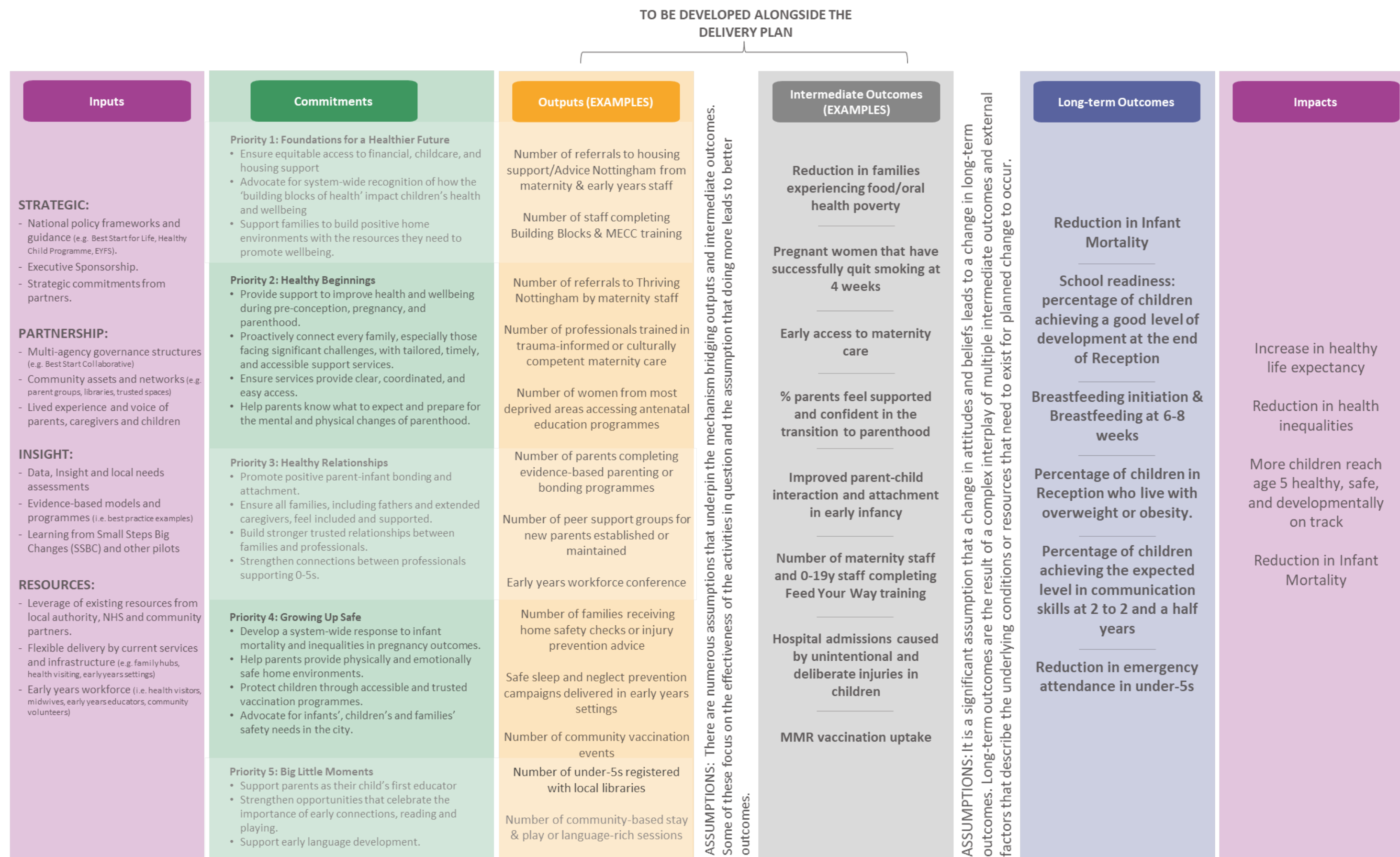
Safe and Nurturing Environments: Reduction in incidents of harm, neglect or unintentional injury in the early years, and more children living in safe, secure, and nurturing home environments.

Improved Access and Experience of Services: More families accessing universal targeted and specialist early years services, particularly those who face greater barriers. Services regularly listen to children and families and offer inclusive support to improve the health and wellbeing of all families.

As we develop our delivery plan we will refine our outputs and outcomes within the logic model to ensure our activity is aligned to key long-term outcomes and positively impacts on the lives of children and their parents, caregivers and families in Nottingham City.



Logic Model outlining a theory of change for the Best Start Strategy



Nottingham City
Best Start Strategy
2025-2035



Nottingham
City Council