



REPORT SUBJECT: Best Start in Life: PSB Progress Update

MEETING: Gwent Public Services Board

DATE: 18.03.26 – Gwent PSB Scrutiny Committee
26.03.26 – Gwent Public Services Board

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1	<p>Purpose of Report</p> <p>The purpose of this report is to provide the Public Services Board (PSB) with an update on progress relating to the Best Start in Life (BSiL) Area of Focus (AoF) and to request support/feedback on the recommendations.</p>
2	<p>Background</p> <p>2a. Building BSIL System</p> <p>The focus of the Best Start in Life work to date has been on building the Best Start in Life system and governance at the same time as supporting and connecting services and programmes that deliver against the strategic mission to give <u>every child</u> in Gwent the best start in life. A BSIL Leadership Group and Regional Management Group is in place and the have agreed the age range, scope, definition and approach for the development of the BSIL Regional Delivery plan (Appendix 1).</p> <p>A process is underway supported by Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) and Torfaen Voluntary Alliance (TVA) to seek expressions of interest from third sector representatives for the BSIL governance groups. To support this the Lead for BSIL presented the BSIL regional plans to the Gwent</p>

	Third sector forum on the 10 th February and provided a briefing on BSIL.
3	Assessment of Progress
	<p>3a. Draft priorities for Best Start in Life</p> <p>At the meeting of the BSIL Leadership Group on the 5th February the group provided feedback and agreement in principle, subject to further engagement and refinement with the BSIL Regional Management Group to the following draft priorities: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning, preparation and pregnancy Emotional and mental health and well-being Child development and education Warm, safe and secure homes Maximising income and accessible childcare Secure employment <p>The priorities were informed by a synthesis of evidence of effectiveness, Building a Fairer Gwent/Marmot report recommendations and the BSIL Joint Strategic Needs Assessment recommendations.</p> <p>Appendix 2 shows the scope of each priority and the intended outcomes associated with each priority area.</p> <p>The next steps in the planning process would be to identify a lead/s to explore the current situation for each of the priorities and assess whether they should form a priority for improvement or be considered an area for monitoring and assurance.</p> <p>Commitment to the BSIL Leadership group is variable across the local authorities and the PSB is requested to reinforce the importance of Director engagement in the work.</p> <p>The Best Start in Life community of practice launched the first issue of its newsletter (Appendix 3) on 22.01.2026 and webinar focused on understanding the impact of trauma and adversity on child development took place 4th February with 60 participants.</p> <p>b. Whole systems approach</p> <p>Mapping work has been undertaken to understand where in the partnership landscape BSIL work is currently taking place. The outcomes of this mapping show a complicated approach to BSIL across Gwent, with varying approaches across the five Local Authorities and a lack of coordination and join up across the strategic partnerships and their associated sub/task groups.</p>

There is an opportunity to establish a more effective BSIL system for Gwent that would work across the strategic partnership landscape and enable greater impact and accountability. The building blocks for this whole systems approach are set out in The Best Start in Life – an early years framework for action (Appendix 4). Implementation of the framework at a regional level would require an appetite for transformation of current early years approach in Gwent into a much more organised, collaborative and simplified system with a common mission across all strategic partnerships and organisations to give every child in Gwent the best start in life.

Discussions have taken place between the BSIL Lead and the Chair of the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) and within the Children and Families Board of the RPB to explore how the two strategic partnerships may work together to more effectively progress the planning, delivery and monitoring of best start in life work and to avoid duplication. The BSIL lead sits on the RPB Children and Families Board, and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Families Board sit on the BSIL Leadership Group and both groups have prioritised integration and joint working for 2026/27.

1c. Securing additional resource for BSIL in Gwent

Opportunities to secure additional funding for the Gwent region have been pursued, with Welsh Government Child Poverty funding secured to deliver a school readiness pilot project Ready to Learn, Ready to Grow (Appendix 5). As part of this work the first Gwent regional conference on Child Development and school readiness was held on 12th February with 82 attendees.

Two further collaborative Gwent region funding proposals have been submitted during this reporting period.

- i. A speech, language, communication and emotional bonding proposal for babies aged 6-15 months and their families from the 1001 Days Critical Foundation lead by Home-Start Cymru and
- ii. A starting with Nature/Dechrau Gyda Natur Gwent early years programme for children under 5, expecting parents' carers and their foster family's proposal to the Big Lottery, lead by Groundworks Cymru and supported by Gwent Green Grid.

1d. Joint work across Areas of Focus.

Everyone lives in a place where they feel safe

On 25th February a conference was held for Primary and Secondary Schools in Gwent on the topic of restorative approaches and

	<p>emotional and mental health. The conference was delivered by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent and the lead for Best Start in Life, Head of Additional Learning Needs for Torfaen Council and young people from Islwyn High School, and teachers from St Helens Roman Catholic Primary School and Maindee Primary School supported by Wales Restorative Approaches Partnership.</p> <p>Everyone lives in a climate ready community where the environment is valued and protected. See funding proposal 1cii (Appendix 6).</p> <p>Everyone has the same economic chances The lead for BSIL has met with representatives from Cardiff Capital City Region to discuss their plans to develop a Child Poverty plan for the Capital City region. The CCR has considerable budget and the contracts associated with that budget could be harnessed to address household income, flexible working, maternity and paternity leave policies for employers in the region. This has the potential to support the BSIL and economic chances areas of focus. To take this forward, this opportunity will be discussed at a future PSB meeting.</p> <p>e. Recommendations</p> <p>The PSB are asked to comment on/note the progress made in progressing the BSIL area of focus.</p> <p>PSB are asked to support the recommendation for progressing a whole system approach to BSIL and progressing discussions with the other strategic partnerships in Gwent.</p> <p>The PSB are asked to reinforce the importance and commitment from nominated Local Authority Directors to engage in the work of BSIL Leadership Group.</p>
4	Recommendations to the PSB
4.1	Note and discuss the progress update relating to the Best Start in Life Area of Focus.
5	Recommendations to the Scrutiny Committee
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5.2	The PSB are asked to comment on/note the progress made in progressing the BSIL area of focus.

	<p>PSB are asked to support the recommendation for progressing a whole system approach to BSIL and progressing discussions with the other strategic partnerships in Gwent.</p> <p>The PSB are asked to reinforce the importance and commitment from nominated Local Authority Directors to engage in the work of BSIL Leadership Group.</p>
	<p>Background Documents</p> <p>Appendix 1 - BSIL definition, age range and scope</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Draft BSIL priorities and outcomes</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Winter CoP newsletter</p> <p>Appendix 4 - The Best Start in Life: An Early Years Framework for Action</p> <p>Appendix 5 – Child Poverty - Innovation and Supporting Communities Grant Application Form for Ready to Learn, Ready to Grow</p> <p>Appendix 6 - Starting with Nature Proposal</p>