

The Gwent Best Start in Life: The Journey So Far

September 2026

Working together, the Gwent Public Health Team have developed a suite of documents to deliver shared priorities, drive collective actions, and improve outcomes, to ensure **EVERY** baby and child has the best start in life





Background

Enabling every baby and child in Gwent to have the best start in life is the first Marmot principle and a priority Area of Focus for the Gwent Public Services Board.

The Best Start in Life (BSiL) refers to the crucial period from pregnancy to age seven, which is understood as the following phases:

- Preconception
- Pregnancy
- Birth to 2 years & 11 months
- Preschool – 3 to 4 years
- Primary school – 4 to 7 years

This is a crucial period when the foundations for lifelong health, learning, and wellbeing are established. Providing the best start in life means ensuring all babies, young children and families in Gwent have the opportunities and experience the conditions needed for healthy physical, emotional, and cognitive development, enabling them to reach their full potential. Evidence demonstrates that investment in early childhood is one of the most effective ways of improving population health, wellbeing, and prosperity, while reducing inequalities ([Academy of Medical Sciences, Prioritising Early Childhood to Promote the Nations, Health, Well-being, and Prosperity report 2024](#)).

While improving outcomes for babies and children is a priority in its own right, it is closely linked to women's health, where significant inequalities exist across Gwent. For example, a newborn female in the most deprived areas of Newport and Torfaen can expect to live around 25 fewer years in good health than one born in the least deprived areas of Monmouthshire ([Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Joint Strategic Assessment, 2025-2026](#)). This stark inequality reflects the impact of poverty and the wider determinants of health across the life course. Supporting women's health before conception, during pregnancy and throughout the early years is therefore critical to improving outcomes for babies, children and families, and achieving the ambition that every child in Gwent has the best start in life.

Outcomes during the early years of life are shaped by a complex interaction of factors, including supportive family relationships and sensitive, attuned parenting, socio-economic circumstances, the wider determinants of health (such as housing, safety, and the environment) and access to high-quality early education and care.

Our Approach

Working together with partners and stakeholders in the early years space, a suite of complementary documents has been developed to deliver shared priorities, drive collective actions and improve outcomes, to ensure EVERY baby and child in Gwent has the best start in life.

These three documents should be read alongside one another:

1. **The Gwent Best Start in Life: The Journey So Far**
2. **The Gwent Best Start in Life: Regional Delivery Plan**
3. **An Early Years Framework for Action: Building an Early Years System in Gwent For The Long-Term**

The Gwent Best Start in Life: The Journey So Far document outlines the rationale, evidence base, delivery plan approach, leadership and oversight arrangements that underpin this suite of documents.

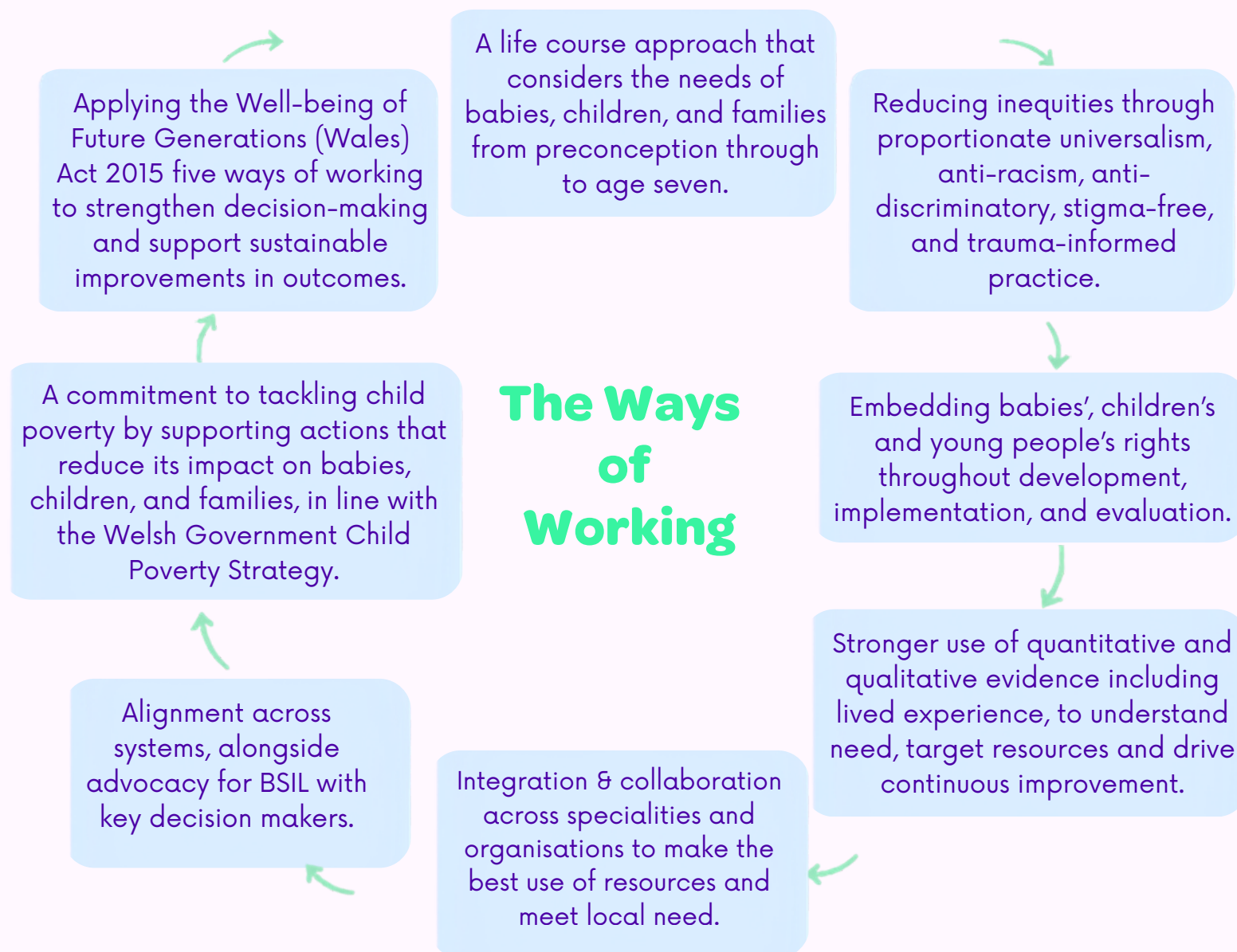
The Gwent Best Start in Life Regional Delivery Plan provides a shared five-year framework for improving outcomes for babies, young children and families across Gwent. It sets out a collective approach to tackling inequalities, strengthening the early years system and ensuring that every child has the best start in life.

The Regional Delivery Plan is informed by extensive evidence, engagement and insight, including the [Building a Fairer Gwent \(Marmot\) Report \(2022\)](#), the [Gwent Best Start in Life Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(0-4 years; 2025\)](#), and the Director of Public Health's Annual Report: '[Our Future, Our Voice: Babies, Children and Young People of Gwent \(2023-24\)](#)'. These reports collectively highlight the importance of early childhood, the impact of inequalities on outcomes and the opportunities for collective action across Gwent.

To provide strategic leadership and drive system-wide change, a Best Start in Life Leadership Group has been established, comprising senior leaders from organisations represented on the Gwent Public Services Board. The group is responsible for providing strategic direction and oversight of the Regional Delivery Plan, while the Best Start in Life Regional Management Group supports implementation and delivery across partner organisations.

The following ways of working will guide the development, implementation and evaluation of activity across Gwent throughout the lifetime of the Delivery Plan.

Giving every baby and child the best start in life



Three Key Elements

Our approach is built around three key elements that work together to improve outcomes for babies, children and families across Gwent:

- **Element 1: Programme Monitoring**
- **Element 2: Priorities for Improvement: Taking collective actions on agreed priorities for improvement.**
- **Element 3: Community of Practice**



Element 1: Programme Monitoring

A range of national, regional and local programmes already contribute to improving outcomes for babies, young children and families. Progress and performance will continue to be monitored and overseen by the Best Start in Life Regional Management Group, with assurance provided to the Best Start in Life Leadership Group and Gwent Public Services Board.

The programmes include:

- All elements of the Flying Start Programme
- Healthy Child Wales Programme
- Families First
- Healthy and Sustainable Pre-School Scheme
- Welsh Network of Health and Well-being Promoting Schools – primary schools
- Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being
- Designed to Smile
- Healthy Start Scheme
- Cynnal the Welsh child payment pilot project
- Community Schools Plus' programme
- Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Plan
- Childcare Offer for Wales

Element 2: Priorities for Improvement

Six priorities for improvement have been identified to focus collective action on the areas with the greatest potential to improve outcomes for babies, young children and their families across Gwent.

The Six Priorities for Improvement:

- Planning and supporting the best pregnancy for me and my family.
- Building strong emotional wellbeing and mental health for me and my family.
- Supporting my family with my development from baby to child to help me be ready to start school.
- Ensuring my home is healthy, safe, secure and comfortable in all weather for me and my family.
- Helping my family to maximise their income to meet my needs.
- Helping me and my family access high-quality, inclusive childcare.

Element 2: Priorities for Improvement Cont'd

Each priority is supported by a focused set of collaborative actions designed to deliver measurable improvements for babies, young children and families. These actions represent areas where partners can work together at a regional level to achieve the greatest impact.

Relevant recommendations from the **Building a Fairer Gwent (Marmot) Report (2022)** are included alongside each priority to demonstrate alignment with wider efforts to reduce inequalities and improve the social determinants of health.

Element 3: Community of Practice

The **Best Start in Life Community of Practice**, established in January 2026, brings together professionals and partners from across the early years system in Gwent. It provides a forum for collaboration, learning and the sharing of evidence, knowledge and good practice to support delivery of the Regional Best Start in Life agenda.

The Community of Practice strengthens connections across organisations and sectors, promotes a shared understanding of what enables babies and young children to have the best start in life and supports a coordinated approach to improving outcomes and reducing inequalities.

The Community of Practice:

- Shares evidence, research and emerging best practice relating to early years and child development.
- Supports delivery of the Regional Best Start in Life Delivery Plan.
- Promotes collaboration and integration across services and organisations.
- Facilitates peer learning, networking and knowledge exchange.
- Showcases innovative practice and local learning from across Gwent.
- Supports workforce development and the dissemination of key early years messages.

Activity is supported through bi-monthly webinars and quarterly e-newsletters. There are also plans to host face-to-face networking and learning events to facilitate relationship building, shared learning and collaboration across Gwent.



Progress Monitoring and Reporting

Progress made in delivering the Gwent BSiL Regional Delivery Plan will be reported annually to the Gwent Public Services Board, providing an opportunity to reflect on achievements, challenges and the difference being made for babies, children and families across Gwent.

The annual report will assess progress against:

- The six priorities for Improvement
- Alignment of regional activity with the three foundation stones for building a stronger early years system in Gwent.

Findings will inform future planning, support shared accountability across partner organisations and help ensure continued focus on improving outcomes and reducing inequalities for babies, children and families across Gwent.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all partners and stakeholders who have contributed to the development of this suite of documents. The collective expertise, knowledge and commitment of partners have helped shape the shared priorities and approaches set out across these documents, providing a shared focus for improving outcomes for babies, children and families across Gwent.

Click to view the

- **The Regional Delivery Plan**
- **Building an Early Years System in Gwent for The Long-Term**

