

The Best Start in Life: An Early Years Framework for Action



May 2025



Introduction

There is a strong and long-standing policy ambition in Wales to enable every child to have the best start in life. However, inequalities continue to arise early and persist throughout children's lives. There is currently a gap between our policy ambition and the ways in which this ambition is enabled and implemented in practice. This gap allows poorer outcomes to persist and drives inequalities.

This Framework for Action describes what we mean by the best start in life and sets a clear vision for the system to achieve this. It identifies the key components of an effective system and describes what good looks like in relation to each of these components. The framework is designed to provide a guiding light, directing action towards a more effective and impactful Welsh early years system. Its implementation would reduce inequalities and enable Wales's strong policy ambition to feel real and impactful in the lives of babies, young children and their families.

Purpose

The Framework for Action has been developed to help improve outcomes for babies, young children and their families by:

- Improving understanding of what the best start in life means for babies in Wales
- Improving understanding of the building blocks that make up an effective early years system and the role everyone has to play in supporting babies to have the best start in life
- Setting a vision for what good looks like in relation to each of the building blocks within the early years system
- Describing what needs to be in place at local, regional and national levels within the early years system to enable the vision to be achieved.
- Providing a structured approach for understanding the gaps in the current system and facilitating the identification of priorities for coordinating future action.

The framework has been developed to help coordinate the action needed to bridge the gap between our policy ambition and the inequalities in outcomes experienced by babies, young children and their families in Wales.

It is designed as a benchmark that describes what good looks like. It is designed to help organisations, partnerships and national agencies identify, understand and prioritise action to strengthen the early years system. The framework is not an assessment of what is currently in place. Some elements identified in the framework may already be in place, some may exist but need strengthening and some may be in development. There will be some areas where new action is required.

Approach

This framework was developed collaboratively with professionals working across the early years system in Wales¹. The framework is informed by their collective knowledge, skills and experience of what matters most at this critical point in babies and children's lives. It was shaped by the views of parents and carers and builds on learning from work that has gone before. It draws on evidence of what works and identifies the things that can have the greatest population health impact, enabling the system to be shifted towards prevention and the reduction of inequalities.

The framework draws on the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, using the definition of wellbeing set out in the Act². As well as health this includes sustainable economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing. The approach to developing the framework has been informed by the five ways of working set out in the Act and supports their adoption across the early years system. The framework also promotes a children's rights approach³. It recognises that babies and children have the right to be heard, to be safe and healthy, to be happy and to play and have optimal nutrition to support them to achieve their full potential.

A multiagency steering group provided oversight for the development of the framework, informed by;

- a rapid scoping review of existing grey literature on parental insights in the early years,
- three facilitated workshops for professionals working in the Welsh early years system,
- findings from two informal consultation sessions with parents and carers
- targeted discussion and workshop sessions with key stakeholder groups.

Building a society where every child has the best start in life

For the best start in life all babies need the same things: to be well nourished, to feel safe, loved and have lots of opportunities to engage with people and explore their world. These are the things that build their brains and bodies during pregnancy and in the early years. They also shape babies future lives; shaping how children grow and feel about themselves, how they interact with others and how they will parent their own children⁴. A good start gives children a solid foundation to build on⁵.

A society where every child has the best start in life recognises the important role of parents and carers and takes action to help families flourish. There are some fundamental building blocks

¹ In line with Welsh policy and practice within this framework the early years is defined as from before birth to age 7

² [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: the essentials \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

³ [The Right Way - A Children's Rights Approach - Children's Commissioner for Wales](#)

⁴ [The Shaping Us Framework - CFEC](#)

⁵ [Nurturing care for early childhood development](#)



that need to be in place. We all need decent places to live and work, and to have enough money to live on. We need to be part of a community and have easy access to services and support. Families that are missing any of these building blocks will find it harder to find time and energy for nurturing relationships, care and experiences⁶. Taking action to strengthen families, reduce pressures and provide the right help at the right time supports the nurturing relationships, care and experiences that babies and young children need for the best start in life⁷.

Our shared understanding of the best start in life

The best start in life is a phrase that is used across a range of policy documents in Wales. However, a clear, shared description and understanding of what this phrase means across the early years system in Wales was identified as a gap.

Developing this description was an important first step in the development of the framework as it was essential to a shared understanding of what we all saw the framework seeking to achieve.

The description below is the shared definition that the group developed, it acts as the vision towards which we are all working and describes what the framework sets out to better enable the early years system in Wales to achieve.

Our shared understanding of the best start in life

The best start in life is about everyone valuing babies and young children, and understanding their future is shaped by relationships and experiences during pregnancy and the early years.

It is about everyone playing their part to create a society where all families flourish and where babies and young children are safe, nourished, loved, listened to, and are able to play and explore. A society where babies have the best chance to be born and grow up healthy, happy and able to develop to their full potential.

It is about fulfilling every child's right to a good childhood now, and also about building a strong foundation for the future.

⁶ [phw a-public-health-approach-to-supporting-parents](#)

⁷ [phw-first-1000-days-a-golden-opportunity-to-build-a-fairer-future](#)

Early Years Framework for Action: Key components

The framework sets out the key components of a system that gives every child the best start in life. It presents a vision statement that describes what good looks like for each of these components and what needs to be in place at a local, regional and national level to achieve this. The structure of the framework is informed by several foundational documents ^{8,9,10,11,12,13}, parental insights¹⁴ and the views of participants collected through the project workshops.

The framework contains three cross-cutting 'foundation stones' which describe the beliefs, goals and structures that are the foundation of an effective early years system. These are:

- A society that values, understands, listens and responds to babies, children and families
- Shared vision, strategy and leadership
- Enabling structures and ways of working

Action at this level isn't easy, but it can have the most profound impact, because it has the potential to fundamentally change the core assumptions and ideologies that inform the priority society places on optimising early years outcomes. Action at this level also helps create the enabling environments required to optimise impact at local, regional and national level.

The framework also contains seven thematic building blocks that detail the specific elements of the system that matter most for babies, young children and their families, directly influencing their day to day lives and outcomes. When any of these building blocks are missing, inequalities in outcomes can arise

- Family friendly, safe & sustainable environment
- Safe and suitable homes
- Safe and supportive communities and networks
- High quality play, learning and care
- Maximise family income and fair work
- Family focussed services
- High quality universal & enhanced health services

Targeting action within these thematic building blocks can enable communities, services and support systems to become more responsive to the needs of babies, young children and families in Wales. When all these building blocks come together families can create the nurturing relationships and experiences babies need to have the best start in life irrespective of the challenges they may face.

⁸ [Children's rights in Wales | GOV.WALES](#)

⁹ [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: the essentials \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

¹⁰ [Nurturing care for early childhood development](#)

¹¹ [phw a-public-health-approach-to-supporting-parents](#)

¹² [Evaluation of the Early Years Integration Transformation Programme | GOV.WALES](#)

¹³ [Children in Wales | Pledge for Babies in Wales](#)

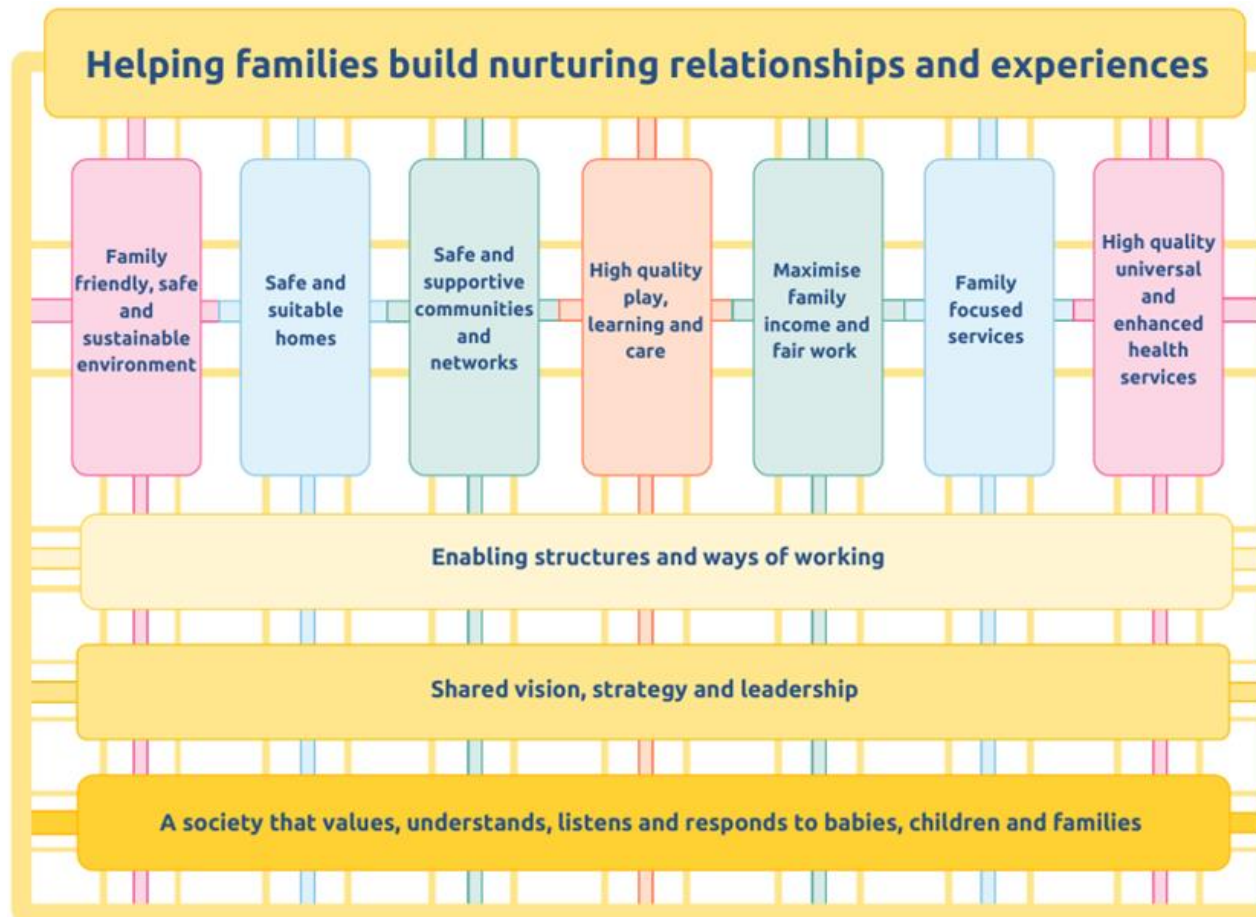
¹⁴ [Public Health Wales. The Best Start in Life: A Report on Parental Insights](#)



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cymru
Public Health
Wales

Early Years Framework for Action: Key components





Early Years Framework for Action: the foundation stones

A society that values, understands, listens and responds to babies, children and families

What does good look like?

All babies, young children, and their families are valued. There is a commitment to the rights of the child and rights-based approaches are embedded across society. The perspectives of babies, young children and families are routinely considered and policy and practice are developed, delivered and invested in, based on a belief that giving babies the best start in life is the right thing to do and essential for achieving our ambitions as a nation.

Everyone understands that the time during pregnancy and a child's early years is particularly special, and that babies and children have a right to be listened to, to play, and to have the best chance to grow up happy, healthy, and safe. The crucial role of mothers, fathers and carers is recognised, and families of all shapes and sizes are valued and included. People understand that everyone has a part to play in supporting babies in Wales to have the best start in life.

What needs to be in place to make this happen?

(Note: this is a benchmark, it is not an assessment of what is, or is not, currently in place)

Local	Regional	National
Mechanisms to facilitate the development and communication of shared values and beliefs in all organisations.	Shared values and agreed principles underpin regional planning and partnership working.	An agreed narrative on the importance of early child development and the activities that support babies to get the best start in life.
Processes to ensure that children's rights are embedded in the planning, delivery and evaluation of local action.	Children's rights are embedded in the development, implementation and evaluation of regional plans.	Tools and guidance to support the implementation of children's rights-based approaches e.g The Right Way ¹⁵
The voices of babies and young children are heard and there are meaningful	Collaborative approaches that involve babies, young children and their families in	Effective mechanisms, informed by the voice of babies for communicating

¹⁵ The Right Way: A Children's Rights Approach in Wales, is a framework in the UNCRC to help public bodies integrate children's rights into every aspect of decision-making, policy and practice. www.childcomwales.org.uk/resources/the-right-way-a-childrens-rights-approach/a-childrens-rights-approach-in-wales/



opportunities for families to have a say in local decisions. Values and principles of baby and child voice are embedded in transition planning to ensure child centred approaches at times of change Children's rights-based approaches and baby and child voice are a core element of workforce training.	regional strategic planning and partnership working. Cross-partnership decision making processes routinely consider the impact on babies, young children and families and maximise opportunities to optimise early childhood outcomes and reduce inequalities. Multi-agency partnerships are committed to anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice and are aware of their own biases. Mechanisms to build understanding across decision makers, service providers and the public of the importance of early child development and how to support it.	and reinforcing the importance of early child development and the importance of supporting families across Welsh society. Mechanisms to monitor understanding and beliefs around the importance of early child development and supporting families across Welsh society. Practical guidance and effective mechanisms to support collaborative working with babies, young children and families. Guidance, training and resources on how to use the voices of babies and children in the design, development and delivery of policy, services and interventions.
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Shared vision, strategy and leadership

What does good look like?

There is an inspiring shared vision for the future developed collaboratively with stakeholders, including babies, young children and families. Evidence, data and lived experience is brought together and stakeholders work collaboratively to understand the current situation, identify needs and opportunities and agree the strategic approach.

There is a clear mandate for action and inspirational and sustained leadership at local, regional and national level is driving change. There is a commitment to protect the needs of future generations and consider longer term challenges. There are strong governance systems. Everyone is clear about what we want to achieve in the future, what we plan to do to make it happen and their role in achieving it. There are clear goals that are aligned with policy areas and priorities across the system to have maximum impact. We know what meaningful change looks like and can monitor our progress towards achieving it.

What needs to be in place to make this happen?

(Note: this is a benchmark, it is not an assessment of what is, or is not, currently in place)

Local	Regional	National
Local leaders across the system are champions for the early years.	The importance and prioritisation of early child development is reflected across regional strategic partnerships and visible to all appropriate system leaders.	A clear and effectively communicated national mandate and call to action.
A local early years strategy and implementation plan.		Clear ministerial leadership for the early years and mechanisms for coordination across ministerial portfolios and policy areas.
Meaningful opportunities for babies, young children and families to have a say in local strategy development and understand how their input has influenced decision making.	Cross-organisational partnerships share the ambition to give every child the best start in life and have a coordinated approach to ensure their strategic priorities are contributing to the ambition.	Clearly defined roles and responsibilities across national bodies, regional partnerships and local organisations.
Effective systems for collecting, analysing and using data and insight to enable understanding of local need and impact.	Cross-organisational partnerships work collaboratively with families to develop a common vision, a clear theory of change and	An early years outcomes framework that is fit for purpose and informed by the outcomes that matter to families.



Monitoring mechanisms that measure success using the outcomes that matter to babies, young children and families.	a strategy for service development and delivery. Mechanisms to align local and national strategic planning and delivery plans, to optimise the impact of partners' collective efforts. Effective systems to collate and analyse data and insight to inform strategic decision making. Collaborative approaches to regional and local strategy development informed by whole system approaches.	Standardised systems for data collection, analysis and publication that enable understanding of early childhood outcomes and inequalities across and between communities and geographies. Integrated IT systems that can work together, linking and sharing information safely to provide a holistic understanding of outcomes for babies, young children and families. Effective mechanisms for understanding and communicating what works and sharing examples of best practice. Clearly articulated early years research priorities. Coordinated action to enable Welsh research that improves the systems understanding of what works to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities.
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Enabling structures and ways of working

What does good look like?

The rights, needs and preferences of babies, young children and families are at the heart of policy and practice in Wales. People are able to work in a way that aligns with their values and the shared vision for the early years. Organisational structures and ways of working support involvement, collaboration and an integrated approach that focuses on prevention and long-term outcomes.

There is effective joint working based on respect and an understanding of the perspectives of other stakeholders. Services and information for families are inclusive, anti-racist and non-judgemental. There is a shared understanding of the importance of early development, evidence-based approaches to support it and the language we use to describe it. Success is celebrated and structures are in place to drive quality, continual improvement and share learning.

What needs to be in place to make this happen?

(Note: this is a benchmark, it is not an assessment of what is, or is not, currently in place)

Local	Regional	National
Decision making processes include a robust assessment of their impact on the health and wellbeing of babies, young children and families.	Opportunities to network and build trusted relationships between partners.	Legislative framework/s that supports the shared vision and values.
Systems in place to ensure sustainable development principles and the Well-being of Future Generations Act five ways of working are embedded in practice.	Effective mechanisms to support collaborative working.	Cross government governance for coordinating action and monitoring progress across the early years system.
Opportunities to build positive working relationships between services.	Collaborative and coordinated approaches to developing regional plans.	An enabling policy environment that enables regional and local leaders to work collaboratively and inclusively to meet the needs of their population.
Evaluation processes built in to planning and delivery and consider service impacts on inequalities.	Integrated regional networks connecting services to make best use of resources to meet local needs.	Sufficient and flexible funding to encourage and support long term planning, integration and collaborative working. Application and
	Regional partnerships with a shared understanding of early child development, nurturing care and what	



Services work with babies, young children and their families to continually improve service delivery. Strong complaints systems to ensure transparency, effective support, and restorative resolution. Mechanisms to ensure that local information and services are inclusive, non-judgemental and accessible for all. Everyone working with families understands the importance of early child development and how they can support it.	babies need for the best start in life¹⁶. Regular opportunities to celebrate success and share learning across partnerships.	monitoring processes that are streamlined and proportionate. Mechanisms to ensure that the diverse voices of babies, young children and families in Wales shape policy decisions. Public bodies are required to assess the impact of decisions on of babies, children and families. Guidance on addressing the needs of babies, young children and families in policy impact assessment. Mechanisms to ensure the impact of local, regional and national policies on babies, young children and families is routinely monitored and reported on. A training and development offer that enables policy and practice to be developed and delivered based on a shared understanding of early child development and nurturing care. Access to robust evidence and insight and mechanisms to support innovation and to test, scale up and share promising practice.
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¹⁶ [Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development](#)



Early Years Framework for Action: the building blocks

Family friendly, safe & sustainable environment

What does good look like?

Neighbourhoods are safe and feel family friendly. People are proud of their local area and want to look after it and protect its future. Decision makers understand what babies, young children and families need and want their neighbourhoods to look and feel like. People are taking action to protect the environment for future generations and decision makers understand the role family friendly environments can play in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Babies, young children and families are able to experience quality green and blue spaces, culture and diverse communities. There is clean air, green space and suitable places for families to meet and children have the freedom to play.

There are safe and pleasant routes to walk to local schools, shops and community activities. It is easy and affordable to get around with babies and young children and take part in leisure, recreation, cultural and social activities. There are good transport links to amenities outside the local area. There is easy and affordable access to work, healthcare, schools, childcare and support networks.

Food environments protect and promote babies and children's right to adequate nutrition from birth. Families have access to affordable healthy food and babies and children enjoy nutritious and high-quality meals within and outside the home.

What needs to be in place to make this happen?

(Note: this is a benchmark, it is not an assessment of what is, or is not, currently in place)

Local	Regional	National
Planning and licensing processes that prioritise health, children's rights and safe, sustainable family friendly environments.	A shared vision for sustainable family friendly neighbourhoods.	National guidance on a children's rights-based approach to planning and licensing.
Equitable access to a diverse range of well-maintained community spaces and activities where babies, young children and families of all backgrounds can come	Coordinated approaches to develop sustainable infrastructure that meets local needs for culture, recreation, food, transport and digital inclusivity.	Secure long-term funding for local infrastructure improvement to create sustainable family friendly environments.
	Decision making processes routinely include a robust assessment of the impact on	Planning and licensing legislation and guidance for businesses protects babies,



together, play, explore and socialise. Local organisations, cultural and community venues welcome babies and children and their right to play and explore. A supportive food environment with opportunities for babies, children and their families to experience growing, cooking and tasting food. Local organisations, cultural and community venues are healthy and nurture family wellbeing. They are smoke-free, support breastfeeding and provide nutritious and high-quality food options for babies and children. Meaningful opportunities for babies, young children and families to have a say in decisions about their neighbourhoods. Stakeholders work together and share information to prevent and reduce crime and keep communities safe.	the health and wellbeing of babies, young children and families. Coordinated approaches across partnerships that prioritise creating safe spaces and environments for babies, young children and families.	young children and families from harm, and the commercial determinates of health. National legislation and policy that supports safe, family friendly and sustainable environments, food environment, culture, transport, and climate change. National guidance on creating walkable, playful, and inclusive streets and neighbourhoods for families in the early years. National guidance on holistic approaches to assessing and enhancing the safety of spaces and environments used by babies, young children and families. Funding and public procurement contracts encourage and support family friendly, healthy and sustainable environments.
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Safe and suitable homes

What does good look like?

Home is somewhere where babies, young children and their families feel safe, secure and settled. Families have good quality homes that are safe and suitable, with space to play, sleep and eat. They are able to maintain, insure, and keep their homes at a comfortable temperature. Affordable housing that is suitable for young children is available in family friendly communities and environments. Families can access support to help them create and maintain a safe and suitable home, positive family relationships and a nurturing home environment. Babies and young children are protected from abuse and neglect and when things go wrong, the priority is to minimise the impact on babies and young children and support them to recover. Problems are addressed quickly and disruption to families and their support networks is minimised.

What needs to be in place to make this happen?

(Note: this is a benchmark, it is not an assessment of what is, or is not, currently in place)

Local	Regional	National
Planning and social housing policies that understand and prioritise the needs of families with babies and young children. Help to ensure that families homes include the facilities to store and prepare food safely, eat, sleep, and have a safe and stimulating space for children to play and learn. Advice and support to reduce the impact of indoor air pollution and enable smoke free homes. Mechanisms to ensure professionals working with families can help them access the right housing support.	Joint priorities and collaboration integrating family needs into regional planning and development. Supportive collaboration with specialist services such as probation where appropriate to build family stability and rehabilitation. Coordinated approaches to providing safe housing and support services for refugee and asylum-seeking families, including access to outreach and early intervention programmes to provide stability and assistance. Opportunities for housing and early years professionals to build understanding and	Legislation and housing policy that recognises the role high quality, affordable homes, and housing security play in optimising early child development and prioritises children's rights. Suitable funding to encourage and support work to improve the warmth, suitability and energy efficiency of family homes. An agreed narrative for professionals working in the housing sector on the importance of early child development and the activities that support babies to get the best start in life.



Help with property maintenance, and energy efficiency for families. Effective safeguarding systems and services to prevent and address abuse and neglect. Services that support housing stability and respond quickly to prevent families with babies and/or young children becoming homeless. Emergency accommodation that is suitable for families. Enabling them to provide healthy food, space to play and maintain social networks. There is support to find a suitable long-term home. Mechanisms to ensure families that move home can promptly access and engage with health and social care and play, learning and care opportunities in their new area.	share learning of the support available for families.	
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Safe and supportive communities and networks

What does good look like?

Babies, young children and their families are part of real life and online communities where they feel safe, valued and accepted and where people support each other. Families can spend quality time socialising with other parents/carers and young children. They have people that they can talk to, who understand their struggles and celebrate their achievements. Parents and carers have a strong network of people that they trust, this might include family, friends and trusted professionals. They find it easy to ask for help, without worrying about being judged. Communities have the knowledge and confidence they need to play a part in helping to keep children safe. The Welsh language and cultural diversity are valued, and services recognise, work with, and enhance informal networks of support. Decision makers enable an environment where communities and families are empowered to express their views and shape the policies and services that matter to them.

What needs to be in place to make this happen?

(Note: this is a benchmark, it is not an assessment of what is, or is not, currently in place)

Local	Regional	National
Sufficient suitable opportunities for families to meet and build relationships with others in their community.	Regional collaboration and coordination to make equitable use of resources and infrastructure for community connection.	Sufficient secure long-term funding to support collaborative approaches to develop community-based activities and support for families.
Collaborative community development work to help build stronger more inclusive communities.	Service planning and workforce development to support collaborative work with families and communities.	Co-produced national plans and policies promote inclusion, embracing all babies, young children and their families as equal and valued citizens.
Effective mechanisms to help families link with community activities and services.	Everyone working with and for families understands the importance of babies' early relationships and experiences and has the knowledge, skills and confidence to support families.	Agreed narrative for communities describing the importance of early child development
Support for volunteers and the development and maintenance of peer led groups and services.		
Support to help manage conflict and promote the	Regional collaboration and cooperation to ensure babies, young children and families	Guidance for community groups on working with families to support early child



development of positive community relationships. Mechanisms to enable communities to shape policy and services. Communities understand the importance of early child development and the activities that support babies to get the best start in life. Support to build the knowledge and confidence communities need to play a part in helping to keep children safe.	feel safe and happy within their community. Multi-agency partnerships are committed to anti-racism and anti-discrimination and are aware of their own biases.	development and reduce inequalities. Guidance on working with communities to shape the development of policy and practice.
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High quality play, learning and care

What does good look like?

Babies and young children are safe, happy and able to play, explore and learn. They are able to experience nature, cultural activities and inclusive communities. Everyone understands and values the importance of play, early learning and socialisation for babies and children's development. Families can access high quality, affordable childcare and opportunities for their babies and children to play, socialise and learn in settings that support growth and development. Early years and school settings provide opportunities to play and be active and offer high-quality nutritious food.

A wide variety of formal and informal childcare is available locally and all families are able to choose the option that works for them and meets their needs. Professionals and practitioners in school and early years settings are knowledgeable, caring and responsive. They listen to and work with babies, young children and their families. Babies and young children transition smoothly between home, childcare and school and settle in quickly to enjoy and get the maximum benefit from opportunities to play, explore and learn.

What needs to be in place to make this happen?

(Note: this is a benchmark, it is not an assessment of what is, or is not, currently in place)

Local	Regional	National
A range of affordable high quality early play, learning and care options that meet the needs of all babies and young children, including Welsh language and those with additional needs. Childcare, early years and education settings are inclusive, accepting and anti-racist environments. Mechanisms to fully understand play needs and preferences of babies, young children and families. Approaches to service development and delivery that recognise the essential	Coordinated approaches to support local services and groups create and maintain play friendly neighbourhoods. Regional collaboration and coordination to ensure good quality play provision and enable equitable access to a diverse range of opportunities for play and socialising for all babies, young children and families. Assets-based approaches to meeting Play Sufficiency requirements that recognise the diversity of places babies,	A shared narrative that emphasises the importance of play and the value of high-quality support for early child development that prioritises nurturing care. An agreed approach to early childhood play, learning and care regularly updated to reflect the latest scientific evidence. An evidence informed quality framework for early play, learning and care provision. Guidance and information on the importance of play and how professionals, services,



role of play and reinforce that play is valued and encouraged. Easy to access and up-to-date Information about local play opportunities. Easy access to up-to-date information about local childcare options. Effective support is available to help families access funded childcare. Healthy and safe early years play, learning and care settings that use evidence informed approaches and support nurturing care and early child development. Food and nutrition guidance for childcare and education providers is implemented in all relevant settings alongside guidance on creating healthy childcare and educational settings. Delivery models that encourage and enable teachers and practitioners to engage with parents/ carers and have positive, responsive, and supportive interactions with babies and young children Childcare practitioners are valued, well paid, well qualified, and have	young children and families enjoy playing and socialising. Early play, learning and care is an integral part of a co-ordinated pathway of support for families. Regional and local planning systems that understand the early years and ensure that private providers, health and education services focus on early child development and work together to meet needs. High quality training and qualifications for childcare practitioners. Providers work together to support ongoing learning and career development. The science of child development is a core element of the training for all practitioners working with children. Clear and simple mechanisms to enable front line practitioners to recognise need/ concerns and take appropriate action.	schools, communities and families can support babies and children's play. Cross government policy that supports the creation of playful and inclusive environments for babies, young children and families. Clear governance, accountability and monitoring arrangements for the delivery of Play Sufficiency requirements. Guidance and information on creating healthy childcare and education settings that includes food and nutrition guidance, the importance of positive food practices and food literacy. Clear governance, accountability and monitoring arrangements for implementing healthy settings guidance and food and nutrition guidance. A strategic approach to enabling all families to access high quality, affordable early childhood play, learning and childcare that meets their needs. Information about funded childcare in Wales is available and easy to understand. Systems to access funded
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opportunities for career development. Childcare and school settings are integrated into local early years systems and embedded into communities. Health, childcare and education services work together and with families to support the transition into and between services. Education policy and practice enables all children to be safe, happy, settled and full and active participants in school life. Health, childcare and education services have mechanisms for building collaborative, trusted and open communications between settings and families.		childcare are simple to navigate. Robust quality assurance systems for childcare training and qualifications. National workforce strategy and guidance that supports development of a play and childcare workforce that is fit for the future. Funding policies support a coordinated approach and help ensure that services are high quality, sustainable, flexible and responsive. Effective data systems to track children through health, childcare and education settings. Guidance for families and practitioners on how to support the transition into and between services.
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Maximise family income and fair work

What does good look like?

Babies, young children and their families are not disadvantaged by poverty. All families have the resources to afford safe, fair living conditions and can participate in activities that ensure babies and young children are healthy and have a wide range of opportunities to play and learn. Employers offer fair work that provides appropriate pay and reward with opportunities for progressions, good working conditions and job security. The contribution parents and carers make to society is valued and this is recognised in the development and implementation of employment rights and policies. Employers trust and value their employees and enable flexibility to support parents to undertake their caring responsibilities.

What needs to be in place to make this happen?

(Note: this is a benchmark, it is not an assessment of what is, or is not, currently in place)

Local	Regional	National
Mechanisms that ensure parents and carers can receive all the benefits that they are entitled to. Effective advice and support through trusted services for families that make it easy to find advice and help with work, money worries and benefits. Effective, non-stigmatising support to help low-income families access and afford healthy food and essential goods and services. Emergency and longer-term support is comprehensive, available when needed and provided in non-judgmental ways.	Stakeholders work together across boundaries to enable families to have equitable access to fair work and opportunities for progression. Regional partnerships understand specific barriers to fair work that impact their population and take action to reduce them. Regional partners prioritise action that reduces and mitigates the impact of poverty on their communities Co-ordinated approaches to enabling family incomes to be maximised. Co-ordinated approach to making the best use of	Cross-governmental policies informed by evidence of what works to reduce poverty and increase access to flexible, fair work for families in the early years. Guidance for employers on fair work characteristics for families and recognition for those that do this well. A comprehensive child poverty strategy implemented through an ambitious, child's rights focused delivery plan and effective mechanisms for monitoring impact. Guidance on providing non-judgmental, non-stigmatising support to families experiencing poverty.



Effective support mechanisms to ensure families can access affordable and inclusive high-quality childcare that meets families' needs. Opportunities for fairly paid, flexible and satisfying work for parents/carers. Employers have supportive parental leave and flexible working policies that optimise work life balance.	resources to meet childcare needs. Anchor institutions¹⁷, act as fair work exemplars, offering flexible, fair work for families and a real living wage. Commitment to procurement policies that encourage fair work opportunities within contracted organisations. Coordinated action to optimise transport and digital infrastructure to support access to work and childcare. Sustainable, coordinated funding for initiatives that support parents and carers back into work and develop their skills. Regional business forums share good practice and training opportunities	Effective national programmes to support low-income families access and afford healthy food and essential goods and services. Approaches to active labour market and economic inactivity policy that is informed by the lived experience of families with young children. Legislation and family support policies that enable job security, increase access to a real living wage and comprehensive and flexible parental leave options. Best practice guidance for employers on approaches to enhancing fair work opportunities for families in ways that reduce the cumulative burden of the multiple social roles parents and carers with young children experience. A Welsh benefits system that is easy to navigate and supportive and responsive to the additional costs new families face in the early years. Mechanisms to influence policy areas that drive child poverty but are not devolved to Wales.
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¹⁷ [Anchor Institutions And How They Can Affect People's Health | The King's Fund](#)



Family focused services

What does good look like?

Babies, young children, parents and carers get the right support, at the right time to enhance family life and help prevent and manage problems. Parents and carers know where to go for information and advice and it is easy to access people with the expertise they need. Effective early help and advice minimises the impact of problems such as debt, relationship issues, or housing problems on family life.

Services are embedded in the community and work together so that families get seamless support. Front line professionals proactively offer and signpost families to the additional information and support they need. There is no wrong door when families ask for help, and they don't need to tell their story again for each service they access. Services are informed by the voice of babies, young children and families. They consider the family as a whole and recognise and build on their strengths. Families feel listened to and respected and not judged.

What needs to be in place to make this happen?

(Note: this is a benchmark, it is not an assessment of what is, or is not, currently in place)

Local	Regional	National
Information and advice on local services and support for families that is relevant, up to date and easy to access and understand. Mechanisms to ensure services, communities and families work in partnership to provide seamless support for the whole family. Effective mechanisms to share information between services to improve the coordination of support for families. Support to enable staff working with families to	Co-ordinated, holistic support for families in the early years is a priority across partnerships and is underpinned by robust regional governance and monitoring structures. Leaders and professionals understand families support needs and work collaboratively to enable services to develop holistic approaches to addressing need. Mechanisms to enable inter-agency coordination and effective information sharing	Guidance and a proactive support offer to encourage and facilitate safe and appropriate data sharing. An agreed set of principles and standards to guide work with families across services. Funding mechanisms that enable long-term planning and provide sufficient flexibility to support measures that address and mitigate the root causes of challenges faced by families. Coordinated cross government leadership and governance arrangements



provide, or signpost to, consistent health and well-being information. All staff in organisations working with families are poverty and trauma aware and understand the impact of stigma and discrimination. Front line staff are confident providing proactive family-centred support in an enabling and non-judgemental way. All front line staff can recognise parent-infant relationship difficulties and offer appropriate support, referral and sign-posting. Well-resourced services and programmes informed by evidence and shaped by the people that will use them. Services are designed and delivered equitably, in ways that maximise acceptability and accessibility for all families. A commitment to the development and delivery of high-quality evidence-informed services with robust systems to drive quality and support continual improvement.	between services and organisations. Collaborative and coordinated approaches to service delivery that enable colocation and minimise the number of contact points families are required to engage with to meet their needs. Data and insight are used to target services based on population needs Third-sector organisations have long-term support and resources. Co-ordinated service design and delivery across regional footprints to maximise impact, avoid duplication and address gaps. Mechanisms to enable frontline professionals to access support and guidance from wider support services.	that support and encourage the early years system to adopt family focussed approaches. Guidance and standardised training for family focused service design and delivery. Simple and streamlined funding processes for grant applications and proportionate approaches to monitoring. Mechanisms to ensure the voices of babies, children and their families are heard across government and influence decisions that impact on their lives. Monitoring framework that utilises measures informed by the outcomes that matter to families
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High quality universal and enhanced health services

What does good look like?

All parents and carers have access to information, support and care to support a healthy pregnancy and help them prepare for parenthood, develop a nurturing and responsive relationship with their baby and be the best parent they can be. Babies, young children and their parents/ carers have a health professional that they know and trust who understands their family and makes sure they get the healthcare and support they need to maximise the whole families' health and mental wellbeing. They feel listened to, valued and respected.

Family's needs are understood, and services are focused on prevention and early intervention providing enhanced support where it is needed. It is easy for parents and carers to ask for help and services work together to make sure families get the right support at the right time. Potential issues are spotted and addressed early.

What needs to be in place to make this happen?

(Note: this is a benchmark, it is not an assessment of what is, or is not, currently in place)

Local	Regional	National
Approaches to local service design and delivery that is informed by the preferences and health and wellbeing needs of babies, young children and families. All families have a named midwife/ health visitor/ school nurse and services are designed to enable trusting parent-professional relationships. Midwifery, health visiting and school nursing services provide high-quality universal care and systematically assess and respond to families' needs. When needed midwifery, health visiting and school	A collective strategic focus on reducing health inequalities through the prioritisation of prevention, early child development, emotional wellbeing and nurturing parent infant relationships. Coordinated and collaborative approaches to service planning that prioritise reducing inequalities and providing support to optimise babies, young children's and families health and wellbeing based on need. Shared opportunities for training and professional development across	Early child development is visible and prioritized in quality statements, remit letters, IMTP plans and other relevant planning guidance. National policy, guidance and service standards for the provision of high quality, evidence informed universal and targeted midwifery, health visiting and school nursing services. National policy and guidance ensures health and wellbeing support is delivered proportionate to families need, irrespective of where they live. Funding models that enable provision of midwifery, health



nursing services facilitate early access to a broad range of support and professionals work together to ensure a seamless transition between services. Enhanced support is available with sufficient capacity to support families quickly and comprehensively when additional health and wellbeing needs are identified. Sufficient specialist health services including perinatal mental health, parent-infant relationship teams, speech and language, infant feeding support, stop smoking and healthy weight services are available to meet local need. All future mothers, fathers and carers are offered antenatal education and care early in pregnancy that is designed to build social networks, parental confidence and includes information on nurturing care. All parents/carers are asked about their relationship with their baby and offered support with the development of responsive, nurturing relationships. All parents/carers are asked about their mental health and wellbeing from	organisations and professional groups. Coordinated approaches to providing parents, carers and the trusted adults with support to understand and enable nurturing parent infant relationships. Mechanisms to enable frontline professionals to access support and guidance from a range of specialist teams including health, social care, housing and benefits. Effective digital systems and infrastructure to facilitate efficient record keeping and communication. Coordinated approaches to supporting families to navigate the health system drawing on voluntary/ third sector support and proactive and sustained outreach. Cross organisational working to enable joined up services including colocation of services. Coordinated approaches to facilitate access to suitable spaces for health professionals to meet and work with families	visiting, school nursing and early years health and wellbeing services in line with national policy and guidance and the principles of proportionate universalism. National guidance on the use of standardised assessment tools to monitor early child development and emotional wellbeing in the early years. National workforce strategy and guidance that supports development of a midwifery, health visiting, school nursing and early years health service workforce that is fit for the future. Professional qualifications and CPD courses include appropriate content on nurturing care, brain science, early development and practical guidance on how to talk about it with parents and support where needed. National guidance and training standards to embed anti-racist and culturally safe practice in midwifery, health visiting, school nursing and early years health services. Shared narrative on the role of midwifery, health visiting and school nursing services in building a sustainable health and care system and shift to prevention.
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pregnancy onwards, and offered further support if needed. Consistent, high quality, up to date information for families to support health and wellbeing and develop parenting knowledge, skills and confidence. Information and support to access local support networks, baby groups and opportunities for targeted parenting knowledge and skills support. Collaborative relationships between health professionals and high quality, trauma informed community-based services to enable seamless, flexible and equitable support and early help. Accessible services for all, with additional support to facilitate access including interpreters, British Sign Language or advocacy support, available when needed. Health professionals who understand the importance of play and advocate for it with colleagues and through their work with babies, young children and families.		National guidance to support the effective delivery of antenatal education and post-natal support to support the transition to parenthood and nurturing parent infant relationships. Consistent, high-quality health and wellbeing information for parents and families that are easy to access and understand. National guidance on maternal and infant nutrition informed by family centered approaches. Clear governance and accountability mechanisms to monitor early years health and wellbeing service quality and impact. Commitment to ensuring funding for health promoting services and early intervention is prioritised and protected. Funding mechanisms that incentivise and enable collaboration and integrated service provision with sufficient capacity to build trusting relationships with families. National guidance on enabling and promoting play in health services and settings.
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Implementing the Framework for Action

The framework describes an optimal early years system and what needs to be in place at local, regional and national level to ensure all babies in Wales have the best start in life. Precisely defining local and regional boundaries within the context of the framework is not an exact science due to the different geographical and organisational boundaries that exist across Welsh public services. As a result, when implementing the framework some flexibility and interpretation, informed by specific circumstances may be required depending on the part of the system in which people work. Similarly different places, services, partnerships, researchers and policy makers may use the framework differently, for example:

- A partnership can work together to assess where its strengths and weaknesses lie in relation to the system as a whole and agree priority areas to focus on collaboratively to strengthen their system.
- A team working within a particular service or policy area can focus on a particular building block and how they can adapt their ways of working to better meet the needs of babies, children and families.
- Leaders and cross-sector partners can use the framework to enable supportive challenge and accountability, providing challenge back into the system in relation to how services, organisations, partnerships and policy makers are aligning their decisions and actions across each of the building blocks of the system.
- Welsh Government can use the framework to inform and enhance joined up policy making and cross-government working.
- National organisations, such as Public Health Wales, can use the framework to understand how to better support effective local and regional action and where once for Wales approaches would add most value.

Measuring our impact

Achieving the best start in life cannot rest solely with a single service. It requires collaborative efforts between national bodies, regional partnerships, local agencies, communities, and the third sector.

The Early Years Outcomes Framework¹⁸ agreed in 2015 identified a number of indicators and important data development areas. However, work to complete the data development process has stalled. An updated Early Years Outcomes Framework for Wales would support the implementation of this framework for action. Developing this was outside the scope of the project. However, stakeholders did identify shared goals.

¹⁸ [Early years outcomes: framework](#) Welsh Government, 2015



A shared understanding of our goals is an important step in identifying and developing suitable outcome measures. When we modify our goals, we can alter what the system prioritises. When combined with effective measures, monitoring and accountability this can redirect efforts and resources towards outcomes that align with our policy ambitions.

Shared goals identified for the early years system

1. Wales is a society where all babies and young children have the best start in life.

This means that;

- Babies and young children are valued and listened to,
- Everyone understands that relationships and experiences during pregnancy and the early years, shape children's future.
- Parents and carers have the time, energy, skills, resources and support they need to build nurturing relationships and experiences

2. Babies and young children in Wales are born and grow up healthy, happy and able to develop to their full potential¹⁹.

This means that;

- They are physically healthy. They have a safe and healthy pregnancy and birth. They continue to grow and develop to their full potential.
- They have good mental wellbeing. They feel secure, loved and listened to. They have a secure attachment to, and nurturing relationships with, the important adults in their life. They are able to recognise and manage their own feelings.
- They have good wellbeing, across all dimensions of well-being (economic, social, environmental and cultural)
- They are developing to their full potential. This includes physical, cognitive, and social and emotional development. They are curious, creative and able to understand concepts and use language to express themselves. They are learning the skills to manage their own feelings and behaviour and build relationships with others.

Conclusion

This Framework for Action sets out a clear vision for an effective early years system that can enable all babies in Wales to have the best start in life. It has been developed in collaboration, and maintaining a collaborative approach will be key to enabling implementation. A commitment from system leaders to implementing this framework can enable better prioritization and coordination

¹⁹ UNCRC Article 6. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>



GIG
CYMRU
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WALES

Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cymru
Public Health
Wales

of our action, ensuring the strong policy ambition in Wales feels real and impactful in the daily lives of babies, young children and their families.

Gweithio gyda'n gilydd
i greu Cymru iachach

Working together
for a healthier Wales