

# Early Years Strategy for Devon 2024 – 2034

Making Devon the best place to grow up

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# Executive Summary

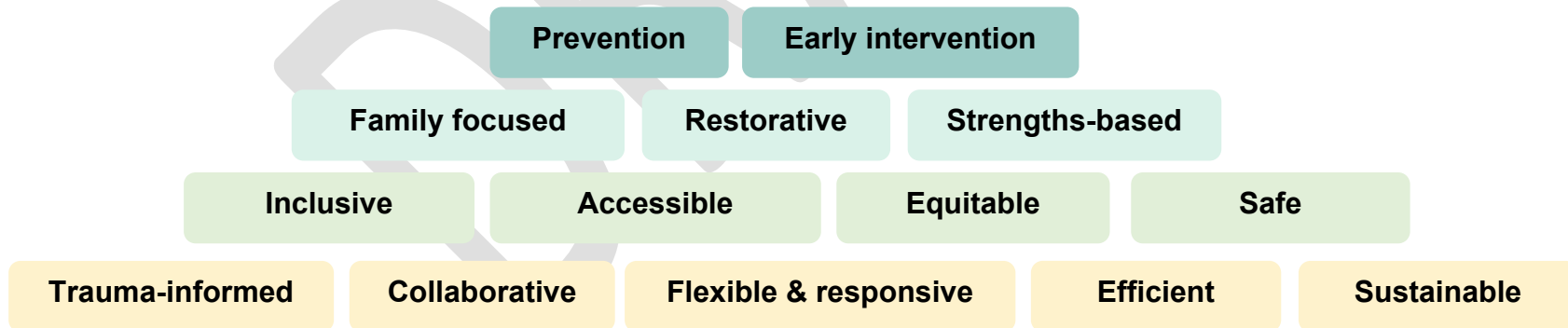
The Early Years describes the period from conception to age five, and is one of the most critical periods in life. As brain growth is rapid in this time, early life stimuli, relationships, and experiences can shape how the brain develops, laying the foundation for a child’s growth, development, wellbeing, and behaviours. The impact of early childhood experiences are significant, affecting nearly every aspect of life and contributing to numerous child, adolescent, and adult outcomes.

The care provided by parents/carers is at the core of children’s development, however there are many other professionals, practitioners, services, organisations, and agencies who have the opportunities and responsibility to provide the best conditions and support children and their families in this critical period so they can thrive, and to help reduce inequalities. Working together across the whole of the Early Years System is essential to achieve this. There is not currently an overarching strategy that sits across all the organisations involved, this strategy aims to address that.

## What are we trying to achieve in Devon?

*“All children in Devon will have the best possible start in life with happy, healthy, and safe childhoods, to realise their full potential and thrive.”*

An enduring commitment of Devon County Council is to make sure that Devon is the best place for all children to grow up, by ensuring that children have the best start in life, with happy, healthy, and safe childhoods, and have the opportunities to realise their full potential and thrive. This is the overarching aim of our strategy and central to our vision, underpinned by our guiding principles that inform what we do and how:



## **Our Strategic Priorities**

There are six strategic priorities outlined in the strategy, each one detailing what it means for families and professionals. The priorities are aligned with several other local strategies (e.g., Devon County Council Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025; Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025; Early Help Strategy 2023-2025; SEND Strategy 2021-2024) and are reflective of the local context and needs of Devon. There are also several policy, legislative, and economic drivers on a national level that provide the backdrop to our strategy development.

- 1 From conception, parents/carers and their children are supported to fulfil their potential by an effective and connected Early Years System**
- 2 All children have a positive journey through their early years to the end of Reception, and are well supported and ready to start Year 1 in school**
- 3 Families and children are well supported when experiencing stressors, to reduce their burden and the likelihood of adverse outcomes**
- 4 Children's early development and learning is expertly supported by a strong, skilled, knowledgeable and well led Early Years System workforce who always advocate for the safety of all children**
- 5 Parents can access sufficient, high quality, and fully inclusive childcare places that support early learning and childcare needs**
- 6 Communities are strengthened to enable families to be the best they can be**

## **Context of our Strategy**

One of the largest counties in the country, Devon has rich natural environment with countryside, moorland, and two coastlines. It is home to around 800,000 people, and host to thousands of visitors each year. There is great potential for people to live healthy and happy lives in Devon, however the geography and demographic characteristics bring some complex challenges.

The county has a higher than average population growth and age profile, largely due to the inward migration of people aged 40-70. There are around 145,000 children and young people aged 0-17, and around 6,000 new births each year. Devon has areas that experience significant deprivation, which sit alongside those which are affluent. There are coastal areas for example in North Devon, Ilfracombe and Barnstaple, which are in the top 10% most deprived areas in the country. Deprivation in Devon is characterised by poor availability of affordable, secure, and decent homes, significant fuel and food insecurity, and high levels of transport poverty which often manifests as poor access to services and support. Earnings in Devon are below the national average, exacerbated by tourism and seasonal employment which creates wage fluctuations and employment instability. Recently, following the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, child poverty has been increasing, with sharp increases in children eligible for Free School Meals, and 15,000 families currently on the housing register.

## **Strategy Alignment**

There The Early Years Strategy for Devon aligns with several other strategies and plans in the Early Years System. From a Devon County Council perspective, it contributes to the delivery of the key overarching priorities in the current strategic plan, including being ambitious for children and young people; improving the health and wellbeing of residents; and helping communities to be safe, connected, and resilient. Investing in the Early Years system and placing emphasis on the wider determinants of health and prevention also supports the strategic priorities of tackling inequality and Devon's economic recovery.

## **Measuring Impact**

A detailed action plan will be created to support implementation of the strategy and enable its priorities to be achieved and our vision for children and families and the Early Years System in Devon to be realised.

An approach to measure the impact of the strategy and its action plan are in the process of development, and will include both quantitative and qualitative measures to help us fully understand whether progress is being achieved in the short, medium, and longer term. Measures will include local data sets and proxy indicators, workforce data, and service quality assessments to provide indicators of success and progress at population and system-wide levels. This will be taken alongside qualitative data and insight from families and other key stakeholders, which will provide greater depth, understanding, and meaning to what we do.

## Introduction: Why are the Early Years so important?

From conception to the age of five is arguably the most critical period of a child's life. Due to how rapidly the brain grows during this time, early life stimuli, relationships, experiences, and environmental exposures can shape how the brain develops. This lays the foundation for a child's personal, social, and cognitive development, and their wellbeing and behaviours as they grow. As such, the impact of early childhood experiences are significant, affecting nearly every aspect of life and contributing to child, adolescent, adult, and even intergenerational outcomes. These include:

- Physical and mental health and wellbeing
- Emotional intelligence, resilience, and how stressors are responded to
- How relationships throughout life are formed and maintained
- The ability to learn and communicate well
- Engagement at school and school outcomes
- Job satisfaction and financial stability
- Risk of involvement in harmful or offending behaviours
- Likelihood of requiring social care and welfare support

This is why the early years are so vitally important. Whilst the brain has the plasticity to reshape, ensuring positive and nurturing environments in these formative years will maximise children's potential, and set the right trajectory from the very beginning.

The care and environment provided by parents are at the core of children's development in the early years, and without doubt are the most influential factors, but it "takes a village" to raise a child, and there are many different professionals, practitioners, services, organisations, and agencies that make up the Early Years System. These all have the opportunity and responsibility for creating the right environment for children to live, play, grow, and learn, and for supporting children and their families in this important period so they are able to thrive and be at their best, and not be overburdened with navigating life's stressors alone. An effective Early Years System is able to identify children's needs and provide the support required to enable access to universal early years education and school and taking a broader view, having sufficient and high quality early years education and childcare can support families with work, training, and education, helping to reduce inequalities.



## National context

Nationally there are several policy, economic, and legislative drivers (see Appendix 1) that underpin and provide context to this strategy, as well as national work programmes that relate to the Early Years System more broadly.

*NB: A new government was elected at time of writing this strategy, and so it is possible the national context for Early Years may change. The Action Plan that accompanies the strategy will be reflective of this, and evolve in the event that new policies or drivers emerge.*

### Best Start for Life

As part of the Early Years Healthy Development Review, The government's Best Start for Life provides the backdrop to improving the Early Years System and ensuring children and their families are supported during the first 1,001 days of life. This vision recognises the importance of this period and its potential impact on future health and wellbeing, as well as the benefits of prevention and early intervention. The vision is structured around six action areas, summarised below, which are a key thread through our strategy.

**Figure 1: Summary of Best Start for Life Action Areas**

Ensuring families have access to the services they need	Ensuring the Start for Life system is working together to give families the support they need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Seamless support for families: a coherent joined up Start for Life offer available to all families</li><li>○ A welcoming hub for families: Family Hubs as a place for families to access Start for Life services</li><li>○ The information families need when they need it: designing digital, virtual, and telephone offers around the needs of the family</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ An empowered Start for Life workforce: developing a modern skilled workforce to meet the changing needs of families</li><li>○ Continually improving the Start for Life offer: improving data, evaluation, outcomes, and proportionate inspection</li><li>○ Leadership for change: ensuring local and national accountability and building the economic case</li></ul>

## **Family Hubs**

Family Hubs are local community assets home to a range of professionals, organisations, and services, designed to support families with children and young people aged 0-19, extending to 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Each Family Hub is relatively unique to their location and community, adapted to the needs of the local children and families they are there for. The idea is that Family Hubs serve as a one-stop-shop to make it easier to get help and services in a way that is accessible, better connected, and relationship centred.

Understanding the broader factors that influence health and wellbeing, Family Hubs may therefore connect and facilitate access to support across a wide variety of topics and needs. This could include advice on housing, debt, and finances, as well as providing access to youth services and domestic abuse support, for example. This will streamline access to services and remove some barriers, through a single point of access for families and closer partnership working across services and the voluntary sector.

Family Hubs are currently being developed and rolled out by many local authorities across the country. Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council already have family hubs. Devon County Council intends to move to a Family Hub Approach from 2025.

## **Early Education and Childcare**

The Childcare Act 2006 introduced the availability of 15 hours free early education provision for eligible two, three, and four year olds. In 2016, this was extended so that working parents of three and four year olds can access up to 30 hours per week for 38 weeks per year (or equivalent time). In the government's spring budget in March 2023, the Chancellor announced a further expansion to the entitlement which will be introduced in a phased schedule:

- April 2024 all working parents of two year olds can access 15 hours per week
- September 2024 all working parents of children aged nine months up to three years can access 15 hours per week
- September 2025, all working parents of children aged nine months up to three years can access 30 hours free childcare per week

## **Economic Drivers**

From an economic perspective, people who are healthier and happier are more productive in their community, which also leads to gains in the labour market such as an improvement in earnings and employment. In enabling people to be in their best health however, the evidence suggests that late intervention is costly, with a 2016 Early Intervention Foundation report estimating that approximately £17 billion per year is spent on late intervention in England and Wales. Prevention and early intervention may therefore bring significant economic benefits, and reduce the need for late intervention, and reduce the demands and costs for public sector services in the long-term.



## Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic



The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented time of collective trauma and uncertainty, with impacts across the whole of the Early Years System and beyond. Children and young people in particular have experienced profound and lasting impacts, with many, in effect, losing years of their childhood and missing out on key social and developmental milestones and experiences.

The pandemic both shone a light on and compounded pre-existing social inequalities. In particular, periods of isolation, school and childcare closures, increasing financial pressures, and a lack of social engagement and face-to-face support most significantly impacted families who were already experiencing disadvantage.

Many parents going through maternity services reported negative experiences of remote or solo appointments within a strained healthcare system that was struggling to cope. Additionally for parents of infants and young children, 'Stay at Home' restrictions removed access to peer support groups and minimised the availability of early social and sensory experiences. There have also been destabilising impacts across the childcare system. Periods of closure and frequent isolation for children and staff have taken their toll, with many experiencing increased financial pressures and losses in the early years workforce.

For school age children, isolation, school closures, and the widespread shift to remote learning for all with the exception of children of 'key workers', widened gaps in education, with children from low-income and already disadvantaged families experiencing barriers to online learning. Learning was also taking place in home environments where in many instances parents were overburdened with juggling work, childcare, and schooling, and tasked with stepping into the role of teacher. These home learning environments also eliminated crucial support systems that many children and families rely upon, for example access to free school meals and social services, and created increased pressure on families.

Understandably, the experience of the pandemic intensified and created mental health difficulties, and the demand for mental health support increased exponentially, particularly around stress, anxiety, isolation, and disordered eating behaviours in young people. Opportunities to notice and address concerns early on were lost, and this has been associated with worsening waiting times for services and increasing clinical thresholds, disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations.

## Local context



Devon is one of the largest counties in the country, boasting a beautiful natural environment with countryside, moorland, and two coastlines, and home to around 800,000 residents and host to thousands of visitors each year. There is great potential for people to live healthy and happy lives in Devon, however the geography and demographic characteristics bring some unique and complex challenges.

### Population characteristics

Devon has an older population profile than other counties, influenced by higher than average population growth due to relocation to the county of people aged 40 – 75. This trend is predicted to continue, with an 11% increase over the next two decades. The majority of the population growth is set to be within the 85+ age range, with low growth in the under 65s. Devon remains a predominantly white population, with only 3 – 5% from black, Asian, or minority ethnic backgrounds. The county is home to around 145,000 children and young people aged 0 to 17, of which 34,490 are under 5s, and there are around 6,000 new births each year.

### Community and economy

Devon has a skilled workforce with higher than average qualifications but lower than average earnings. There are areas in the county that experience significant deprivation and disadvantage, higher than the national average, particularly in rural areas of North and West Devon (see Appendix 2). Ilfracombe and Barnstaple in North Devon for example are in the top 10% most deprived areas in the country. There are pockets of severe deprivation in more urban areas as well, with areas in Exeter, Newton Abbot, and Teignmouth in the top 20% most deprived areas nationally. Patterns of deprivation in Devon are complex, with pockets of deprivation and disadvantage sitting alongside areas of affluence.

Deprivation in Devon is characterised by poor availability of affordable, secure, and decent housing, high levels of fuel poverty and food insecurity, and a lack of available, affordable, accessible, and reliable transport options. Many of these factors are experienced in tandem, overloading people and families with environmental, contextual, and social stressors. On a systemic level, this often also manifests as poor and inequitable access to public services and support. Whilst tourism and seasonal employment are main players in Devon's economy, this contributes to the lack of available housing, wage fluctuations, and employment instability. Homelessness has also increased following the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, with more than 15,000 families on the housing register, and the average house price more than nine times annual earnings.

Alongside this, child poverty has increased, partly reflected in the substantial rise in children eligible to receive Free School Meals (FSM) where 19.8% (19,153) of children are currently eligible, and the number of households with children requiring support from emergency and community food organisations.

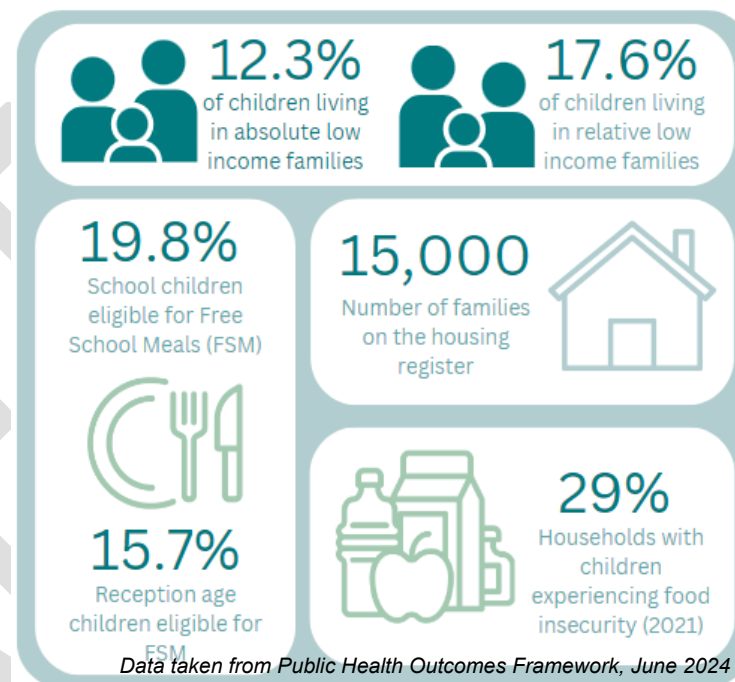
## Climate Emergency

Devon County Council is part of the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group which is a collaboration of public, private, and voluntary organisations. Recognising the significant implications of climate change for Devon's communities, including impacting upon the natural environment, infrastructure, economy, and health and wellbeing, a climate and ecological emergency was declared in 2019. Therefore this is considered throughout all of Devon County Council's work and services, and the council is committed to building a low carbon economy, that reduces climate risks and supports the development of more sustainable, healthy, and fair places to grow up, live, and work.

## Social mobility

Social mobility describes the change in someone's socioeconomic situation either in relation to their parents or throughout their lifetime, and includes the ability and opportunity to advance through education and employment. A 2022 report by the University of Exeter revealed the South West has the lowest educational outcomes for pupils experiencing disadvantage of any English region. In 2019, 40% of disadvantaged pupils attained a pass grade in GCSE English and Maths, and only 17% went on to university - the lowest nationally.

## Crime



Overall crime rates in Devon are low, with antisocial behaviour and theft offences being most common. However there are increasing risks posed from serious and violent crimes such as drug networks that capitalise on the rurality of the county, Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), and domestic violence.

The Serious Violence Needs Assessment carried out by Devon County Council in 2023 identified that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are associated with an increased vulnerability to experiencing violence in later life, as well as increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system with children and young people with experience of the care system disproportionately represented in the youth justice system. ACEs are wide ranging, and include abuse, physical and emotional neglect, parental substance misuse, poor mental health of a parent, parental separation, domestic violence, and familial imprisonment. These can be compounded by poverty, discrimination, lack of economic and social mobility and capital, and poor quality housing at a systemic level.

## **Health and wellbeing**

The health and wellbeing challenges in Devon are broadly reflective of the wider social, geographic, and demographic context and economic environment. The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for 2020-2025 highlights the ten main challenges Devon currently faces, and is likely to face in the future:

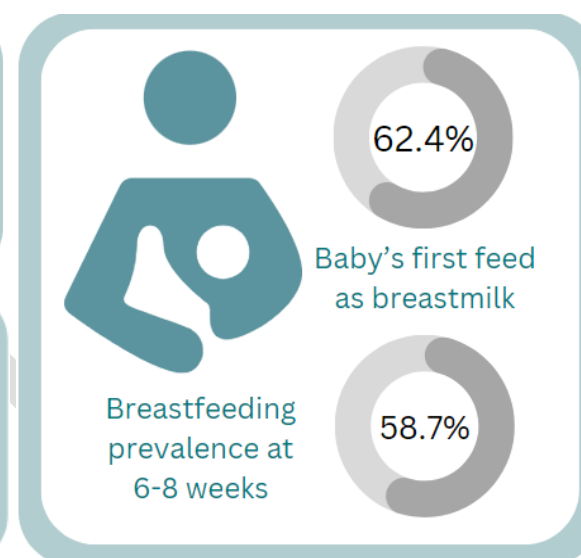
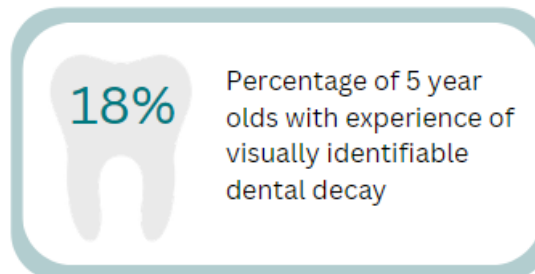
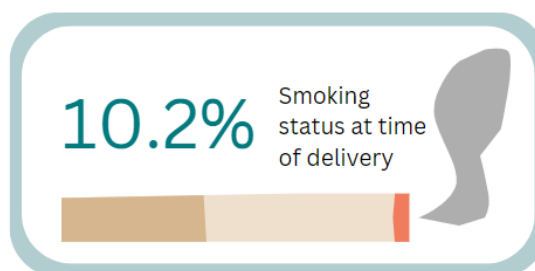
1. An ageing population
2. Access to services
3. Complex patterns of urban or rural deprivation
4. Housing issues (quality & affordability)
5. Earlier onset of health problems in more deprived areas
6. Poor mental health and wellbeing, social isolation, loneliness
7. Poor health outcomes caused by modifiable health-related behaviours
8. Pressures on services caused by long-term conditions, multi-morbidity, & frailty
9. Shifting to a prevention focus across the health and care system
10. Unpaid care and associated health outcomes for carers

There are additional health and wellbeing challenges for children and young people in Devon that remain a priority, particularly where Devon has worse outcomes than the national average. In pregnancy, this includes a current smoking at time of delivery rate of 10.2%, above the national average of 8.2%, and breastfeeding rates, where 62% of babies have breastmilk as their first feed, and 58.7% are still being breastfed at 6-8 weeks. By age five, 18% of children also have visible dental decay, partly reflective of limited availability of NHS dental care and its accessibility.

Devon also has a higher than average proportion of children and young people with SEND, with 13,624 receiving SEN support in school in 2021, and 25% of all Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) issued before the start of school at age four. The main needs experienced by these children primarily relate to speech, language, and communication (25%), and social, emotional, and mental health (22%).

## Development and school readiness

Broadly, the term school readiness describes the developmental milestones that are required for children to be able to attend and engage with school. This includes speech and language, cognitive, and social and emotional development, as well as overall health, and is assessed by teachers through the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile. In Devon, 67% of children achieve a good level of development by the end of Reception year, however this is only 47% of children eligible for Free School Meals. Additionally, as of June 2024, a fifth of children do not have the expected level of communication and language skills at the end of Reception, potentially impacting their experience at school.



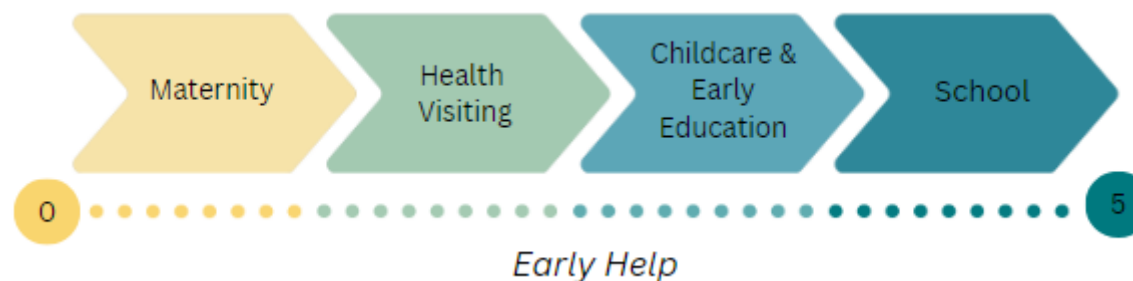
*Data taken from Public Health Outcomes Framework, June 2024*



## Early Years Service Journey

The Early Years journey starts at conception and lasts until the end of Reception year at school, so there are many services, organisations, and professionals forming the Early Years System that may come into contact with and provide support to children and their parents/carers during this time. The main services include maternity, health visiting, early education and childcare, and school, with Early Help and targeted support running in tandem (Figure 2), but may also include Devon County Council, health services, and the voluntary and community sector.

**Figure 2: Illustration of the Early Years service journey from 0 – 5 years**



Devon has a committed and passionate early years workforce, and in general, families are well supported (see Appendix 3 for quality ratings). There have been significant pressures placed on the Early Years System in recent times, and there is some work to do to embed good level of practice equitably across the county and ensure all actors in the system work more effectively together around the needs of families.

### **Maternity**

Maternity services in Devon are delivered by three NHS trusts across the whole county, including Plymouth and Torbay: Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Trust; Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust; and University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust. Information on the quality of care available in maternity services can be found in Appendix 3.

### **Health Visiting**

The Health Visiting service is part of Public Health Nursing and provides health services and support on child development and key milestones to all families, additional specialist support for more vulnerable children and families, and works to protect and safeguard children.

### **Childcare and Early Education**

Provision of childcare is a key factor in parents/carers ability to access employment, so maximising take-up of funded provision and ensuring availability of good quality provision is important. In Devon, there are 1,338 providers of childcare and early years education, including childminders, pre-schools, day nurseries, and schools with Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision. In general, there is good take-up of free childcare entitlement (see Table 1), and good quality provision, with 97% of settings rated by Ofsted as Outstanding or Good (see Appendix 3 for more information). The latest Childcare Sufficiency Assessment for Devon carried out in 2022-2023 found that overall early education and childcare provision is sufficient, although the rural vs. urban spread of different types of provision varies, and there are hotspots of concern with insufficient childcare.

**Table 1: Childcare provision and uptake data, Autumn 2023**

<b>Childcare entitlement type</b>	<b>Take up of eligible children</b>
2 year olds accessing a funded place	85.7%
Universal entitlement for 3-4 year olds	95.7%
Working Parents entitlement for 3-4 year olds	53.7%
Disadvantaged funding for 2 year olds	91.9%
Working Parents entitlement for 2 year olds	<i>No data currently available</i>
Working Parents entitlement for under 2s	<i>No data currently available</i>

### **School**

The early years journey continues into Reception year in school, where teachers deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum to work towards completing of the EYFS profile. This is a statutory assessment of children’s development at the end of Reception, which is assessed against Early Learning Goals across areas of communication and language, personal and social development, physical development, literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, and expressive arts and design. The purpose is to support children to transition into Year 1, and assessments are made by teachers using their professional judgement and knowledge of what each child knows, understands, and can do.

### **Early Help**

Early Help describes an approach that involves collaborative and integrated working of a range of different services and teams who work with the whole family to make improvements for all and meet the needs of the family being experienced at that time. It is not a service in itself, but a way that all services and organisations support families and children when help is needed. The aim is to identify a family’s strengths and help them to resolve their own challenges, whilst providing the support to develop any skills as appropriate to prevent challenges down the line.



# What are we trying to achieve in Devon?

“All children in Devon will have the best possible start in life with happy, healthy, and safe childhoods, to realise their full potential and thrive.”

An enduring commitment of Devon County Council is to make sure that Devon is the best place for all children to grow up, by ensuring that children have the best start in life, with happy, healthy, and safe childhoods, and have the opportunities to realise their full potential and to thrive. This is the central focus of our vision and overarching aim, underpinned by our guiding principles:

**Prevention:** *Strive to prevent problems occurring, by supporting families to have healthy pregnancies and be prepared for parenthood and through the provision of high-quality, health-promoting early years services*

**Early intervention:** *Maximise opportunities for early intervention by identifying challenges as early as possible to ensure families can access the right support at the right time, reduce harm, and prevent escalation*

**Family focused:** *View the health and wellbeing of children through a holistic lens, considering the family as a whole and seeking to address their collective needs*

**Restorative:** *Build strong, meaningful, and trusting relationships with families and apply the ‘Five R’s’ of restorative practice throughout our work*

**Strengths based:** *Recognise the strengths and assets that exist in families and communities, empower families, and build capacity to promote health and wellbeing from within the community*

**Inclusive:** *Embed a culture of inclusivity across the early years, celebrating diversity and promoting initiatives that actively support and engage children and families from all backgrounds*

**Accessible:** *Ensure that support and services are truly accessible by tailoring support to communities and addressing common accessibility barriers*

**Equitable:** *Reduce inequalities by considering the wider determinants of health and using a proportionate universalism approach to deliver resources according to need*

**Safe:** *Work together to realise our collective responsibility to advocate for and keep children safe*

**Trauma-informed:** *Recognise trauma is a possible response to adversity, and work across the Early Years System to prevent adversity, address trauma in a timely manner, and restore wellbeing and resilience*

**Collaborative:** *Work together in partnership as a system, valuing each other’s roles and contributions and working with a shared language, vision, priorities, and outcomes*

**Flexible & responsive:** *Work together to create a system that is responsive to children and families through meaningful engagement and co-production with communities, treating families as equal partners and ensuring that their views and experiences are at the heart of what we do*

**Efficient:** *Share data, intelligence, and family feedback across the system to identify shared solutions, reduce duplication, and improve efficiency*

**Sustainable:** *Work together to reduce carbon emissions across the Early Years System and support families and communities to be more sustainable*



# Our Strategic Priorities

## Priority 1: From conception, parents/carers and children are supported to fulfil their potential by an effective and connected Early Years System

### What does this look like for families?

- Families feel that their experiences and voices are heard, respected and valued.
- Families only have to tell their stories once.
- Families are never turned away when they reach out for help.
- There is local accessible and inclusive support for individuals, families, and communities to address multiple sources of disadvantage that occur throughout children's lives.
- Antenatal information, support, and advice is accessible and relevant to all parents/carers.

### What does this look like for professionals?

- Shared understanding and use of language throughout the Early Years System.
- A cohesive and collaborative Early Years System without gaps and duplication, demonstrating effective multiagency working.
- Clear and effective governance arrangements are in place.
- All partners in the Early Years System feel their contribution is recognised, respected, and valued.
- All partners in the Early Years System have a good understanding of the different roles and responsibilities in supporting parents/carers, and work collaboratively to provide appropriate information, advice, and support.
- Accurate, responsive, and joined up local data systems inform strategic planning, effective targeting of support, monitoring, and continual improvement of the offer.
- Health agencies delivering early support to expectant and new parents/carers provide access to good quality information and support in the ante- and post-natal periods.

## **Strategic Priority 2: All children have a positive journey through their early years to the end of Reception and are well supported and ready to start Year 1 in school**

### **What does this look like for families?**

- All children are well supported by their families, communities, and local organisations, whatever their unique needs, abilities, culture, and ethnicity.
- Parents/carers understand the role they play in supporting children to prepare for moving into Reception class and starting Year 1.
- Families can access appropriate information and advice on providing safe and nurturing environments for their children throughout the early years and into Year 1.

### **What does this look like for professionals?**

- All partners in the Early Years System understand the importance of their role in supporting children to be well prepared for Year 1.
- The Balanced System® Framework is implemented across the Early Years System with improvements in children's early language and communication, relationships, and attachment.
- The Early Years System is supported with appropriate information on policy, research, and insight about how best to support children in the early years.
- An agreed system-wide approach to improving oral health and reducing oral health inequalities in children aged 5 and under.
- An agreed system-wide approach in recognition of the importance of social and emotional health in the early years to reduce the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences and promote good mental health and wellbeing across the life course.
- Schools recognise they are a key partner in the Early Years System.

### **Strategic Priority 3: Families and children are well supported when experiencing stressors, to reduce their burden and the likelihood of adverse outcomes**

#### **What does this look like for families?**

- All families who need it can access appropriate support, information, and advice to make informed decisions and know where to get help.
- The Early Years System supports all families in Devon, with a scale of support that is proportionate to need.
- All families experience a welcoming and supportive Early Years System regardless of their unique intersecting needs.
- Parents/carers and families receive the support to alleviate the impacts of child poverty.
- All children and families benefit from Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision (OIAP).

#### **What does this look like for professionals?**

- Our Early Help approach provides effective, coordinated support as early as possible when children and families need it.
- All partners in the Early Years System have the knowledge and skills to support families whatever their unique intersecting needs, abilities, culture, and ethnicity.
- Appropriate information, advice, and support is accessible to the families of children who may be at risk of poor outcomes to help them thrive.
- All partners in the Early Years System have a good understanding of Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision (OAIP) and the groups of children who may be at risk of poor outcomes, and are able to help them access support needed for them to reach their potential.
- A trauma, shame, and neurodivergence informed Early Years System mitigates the impact of childhood adversity and prevents further harm.

**Strategic Priority 4:** Children’s early development and learning is expertly supported by a strong, skilled, knowledgeable, and well led Early Years System workforce who always advocate for the safety of all children

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## Strategic Priority 5: Parents can

### What does this look like for families?

- All children can access high quality early years provision and are supported by skilled and knowledgeable Early Years Practitioners.
- Families and children see a diverse and inclusive Early Years workforce.
- Families receive timely help, advice, and support.
- Families hear consistent messaging and information across different parts of the Early Years System.

### What does this look like for professionals?

- Careers in the Early Years System in Devon are well respected, valued, and popular.
- There are good recruitment and retention rates across all parts of the Early Years System.
- There is a more diverse and inclusive Early Years workforce.
- Good leadership enables all staff working in early years settings to have appropriate support, management, and supervision to enable them to excel in their roles.
- The Early Years workforce access a shared training and development offer which contributes to continued and sustained professional development.
- All staff are appropriately trained and confident to have professional curiosity and always advocate for the wellbeing and safety of the child
- Staff wellbeing is valued and promoted.

**access sufficient, high quality and fully inclusive childcare places that support early learning and childcare needs**

## **Strategic Priority 6: Communities are strengthened to enable families to be the best they can be**

### **What does this look like for families?**

- There is sufficient pre-Reception and school age education and childcare in Devon to meet the needs of parents/carers, and those wanting to access funded entitlements.
- All Early Years settings are inclusive, accessible, and capable of meeting the diverse, unique, and intersecting needs of children.
- All parents are aware of and know how to access their free early education entitlement.
- A positive transition from pre-Reception to Reception.
- The importance of informal childcare to parents is recognised and support is given to those both using and providing informal childcare.
- Employers in Devon offer flexible working to enable parents/carers to fulfil childcare responsibilities.

### **What does this look like for professionals?**

- Early Years settings are well managed, planned effectively, and financially robust, reflected in their financial security and the quality of care provided.
- The long-term sustainability of our Early Years and childcare sector is effectively supported.
- Clear and rewarding career paths for Early Years staff.
- Early Years settings and schools are an integrated part of the Early Years System and Family Hubs.
- Early Years settings and schools work together to ensure children are achieving well at the end of Foundation Stage and are ready for Year 1.

### **What does this look like for families?**

- Children and families are resilient and feel empowered to reach their full potential.
- Families can access appropriate information, advice, and support to make informed decisions.
- Families are supported by social networks and peer support in their communities.
- Support is available and accessible to all families.
- Families whose children are at greater risk of poor outcomes are involved in the co-design and co-delivery of the Early Years System.

### **What does this look like for professionals?**

- The Early Years System is an integral part of Family Hubs enabling a seamless whole family approach.
- There is a joined up offer of support delivered by local authority and NHS services, VCS organisations, libraries, and other organisations and groups that meet the needs of local communities.
- The support offered to parents is evidence based, reflects local insight, and is monitored and evaluated to ensure it is responsive to need and improving the lives of families.
- Information, advice, and guidance is available through an online single point of access resource.
- Schools are anchor organisations at the heart of communities.
- The early years are included in housing, transport, economy, and environment plans and policies.

## Alignment to local strategies and plans

The Early Years System interlinks with other local systems, and is a key component required to achieve the aims of Devon County Council and the One Devon Integrated Care Board (ICB). As such, this strategy builds upon and aligns with other strategies and plans in the local area, including:

- [Children and Young People's Plan 2019 – 2023](#)
- [Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2024](#)
- [Devon County Council Strategic Plan 2021-2025](#)
- [Early Help Strategy 2023 – 2026](#)
- [Early Years One Devon](#)
- [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025](#)
- [One Devon Joint Forward Plan and Integrated Care Strategy](#)
- [SEND Strategy 2021-2024](#)
- [Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2024](#)
- [Serious Violence Prevention Strategy 2024-2029](#)
- [Devon Carbon Plan](#)

In particular, from a Devon County Council perspective, this strategy contributes to the delivery of the key overarching priorities which are set out in the current strategic plan. This includes being ambitious for children and young people; improving the health and wellbeing of residents; and helping communities to be safe, connected, and resilient. Additionally, investing in the Early Years and placing an emphasis on prevention to improve the health and wellbeing of children and families ultimately contributes to the strategic priorities of tackling poverty and inequality, and investing in Devon's economic recovery.

The strategy also aligns with the delivery of One Devon's Joint Forward Plan and Integrated Care Strategy, which outlines a vision of "Equal chances for everyone in Devon to lead long, happy, and healthy lives", and a specific ambition for "all children and young people to have the best start in life, grow up in loving and supportive families, and be happy, healthy, and safe".

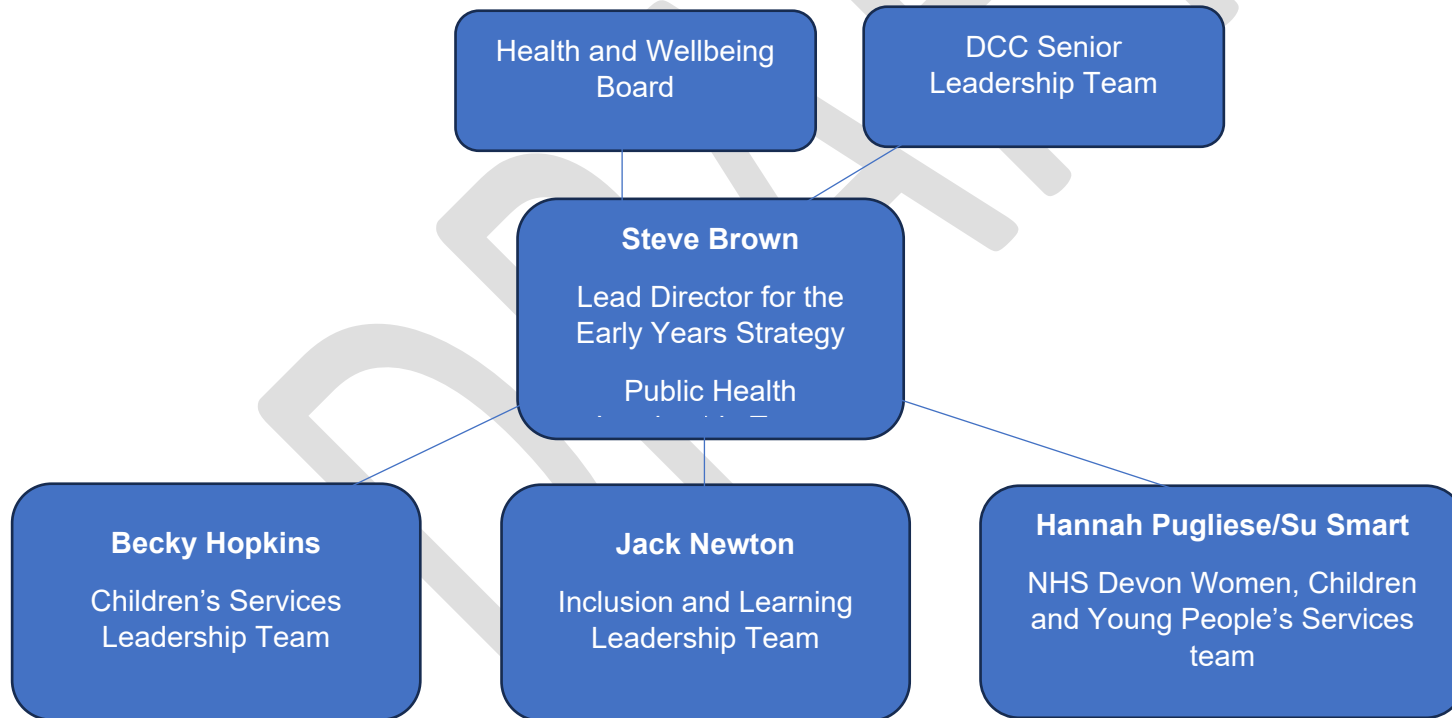


# Governance and measuring impact

A comprehensive and detailed action plan will be developed to enable the priorities of the strategy to be achieved and our vision for the Early Years System and children and families in Devon to be realised.

## Governance

The proposed Lead Director for the Early Years Strategy is Steve Brown (Director of Public Health and Communities). The key groups that will collaboratively lead on the strategy implementation are represented within the governance structure chart below. These are the Public Health and Communities team, Children’s Services, the Inclusion and Learning team and the NHS Devon Women, Children and Young People’s Services team. Each team has a named senior sponsor to be a representative for the Early Years Strategy.



## Measuring impact

An approach to measure the impact of this strategy and its action plan are currently being developed, and it will include both quantitative and qualitative measures to help us understand whether progress is being achieved in the short, medium, and longer term for children and their families and the Early Years System, and to help us be responsive to their needs and changing contexts.

Quantitative measures will include local data, and include proxy indicators, to provide an overview on a population level. Overall assessments of service quality such as the CQC and Ofsted inspections of services will also be included to give indicators at a system level, and workforce indicators such as staffing levels, recruitment and retention, and turnover will also be used. Qualitative data and insight from families and other key stakeholders in the Early Years System will also be routinely gathered and evaluated to provide greater depth, understanding, and meaning to the outcomes of this strategy, and ensure there is a complete picture available.

DRAFT

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Key Legislation & Guidance

### ***Children Act 1989***

Key legislation in safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. This act places a duty on local authorities to safeguard children who are in need, and requires them to proactively assess whether or not a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and judge whether action is required.

### ***Education & Inspections Act 1996***

This act places a duty on local authorities to promote high standards and the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. It places a duty on local authorities to promote fair access to educational opportunity.

### ***Childcare Act 2006***

The Childcare Act 2006 (updated in 2016 and 2018) addresses the provision and regulation of childcare services and is driven by enhancing the wellbeing and development of children and reducing child poverty and inequalities. It outlines key principles for standards for childcare settings, and emphasises the importance of partnerships between parents and childcare providers, promoting communication and collaboration. A key objective is to improve the quality and accessibility of childcare, and provides legal duties on local authorities to improve outcomes for children up to five years old and reduce inequalities between them. The act also established the Early years Foundation Stage statutory framework that sets out standards for learning, development, and care of children up to age five. Updates to the Act include extending Free Early Education Entitlement.

### ***Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018***

Statutory guidance setting out responsibilities that everyone must safeguard and promote the welfare of children and the expected arrangements that local areas should establish to enable collaboration between agencies.

### ***The Equality Act 2010***

The Equality Act brings together multiple pieces of legislation into a single act to provide a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality and opportunity for all. It provides protection against direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimisation for anyone using public services and in the workplace. This includes local authorities, schools, and early years and childcare providers. The Public Sector Equality Duty provides a legal requirement on public bodies to consider the impact of their decisions and policies on anyone who has a protected characteristic.

### ***The Children & Families Act 2014***

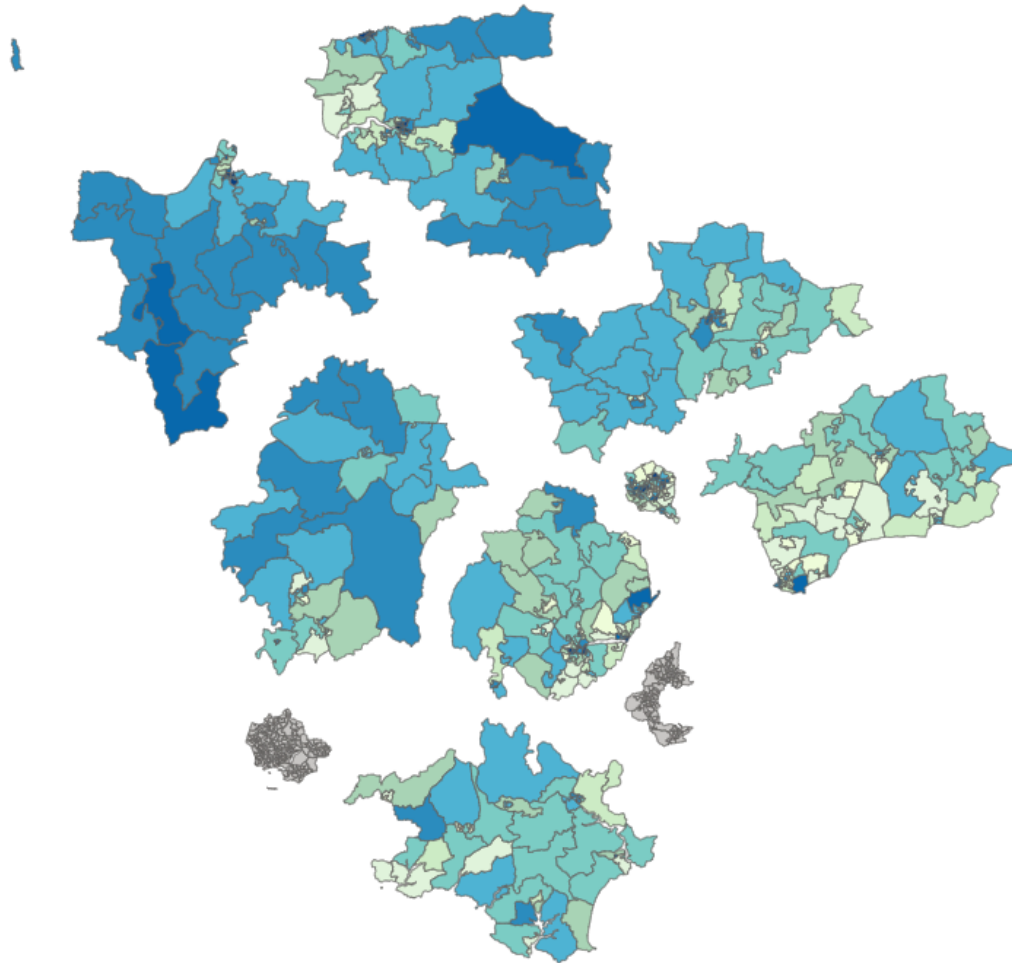
The Children and Families Act 2014 includes childcare, children's welfare, and changes in local authority statutory duties in relation to the Local Offer for children with SEND. The Act brings together the separate arrangements for children with SEND in schools and young people in post-16 education and training up to their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, and outlines the integrated Education, Health, and Care Plan.

### ***SEND Code of Practice 2015***

The SEND Code of Practice provides statutory guidance on the SEND system for children and young people aged 0-25. It outlines the legal requirements and statutory guidelines for schools, academies, and local authorities. The Code requires educational establishments to identify and address the needs of their pupils with SEND.

## Appendix 2: Map of deprivation by LSOA

IMD ● 1 ● 2 ● 3 ● 4 ● 5 ● 6 ● 7 ● 8 ● 9 ● 10



The English Indices of Deprivation (IoD) is the official measure of relative deprivation in the 32,844 small areas or neighbourhoods, known as Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in England. LSOAs are designed to be of similar population size, with an average of 1500 residents or 650 households. The IoD is comprised of seven domains of deprivation which are income, employment, education, health, crime, housing, and living environment. These domains are weighted together to form the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) which is used as an overall measure of deprivation. Deprivation domain ranks are used to rank each LSOA from most deprived to least deprived.

This map shows the IMD in Devon in 2019. LSOAs are coloured according to deprivation deciles, with 1 being most deprived, and 10 least deprived.

## Appendix 3: Service Quality

### **Maternity & Early Years Maturity Matrix**

The Maturity Matrix is an assessment tool developed by the Early Intervention Foundation to support local areas in taking a system-wide approach to improving outcomes for children and families. The tool involves a local and multi-agency self-assessment, and focuses on the local arrangements for early childhood intervention and identifies strengths and areas for improvement across several key elements and dimensions (see Table 2 for a summary).

**Table 2: Summary of the EIF Maternity & Early Years Maturity Matrix.**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Key Elements</b>	<b>Progress Levels</b>			
<b>Plan</b>	1. Strategy	<b>1 Basic Level</b>  Principle accepted and commitment to action	<b>2 Early Progress</b>  Initial development	<b>3 Substantia l Progress</b>  Initial results achieved and positive outcomes evident	<b>4 Mature</b>  Embedded good practice, others learning from achievements
	2. Commissioning				
	3. Workforce planning				
<b>Lead</b>	4. Partnership				
	5. Leadership				
	6. Community ownership				
<b>Deliver</b>	7. Services and interventions				
	8. Information sharing				
<b>Evaluate</b>	9. Outcomes				
	10. Using and generating evidence				

In 2021, Devon undertook assessment utilising the EIF framework, and has been rated as ‘Early Progress’ across the majority of the elements. This is reflective of the commitment to take action and the developing programme of work.

### **CQC Ratings**

**Table 3: CQC Ratings for Health Services**

Service	Rating
Maternity Services - North Devon District Hospital	Requires Improvement
Maternity Services - Royal Devon University Healthcare Exeter	Good
Maternity Services - Torbay Hospital	Requires Improvement
Maternity Services - University Hospital Plymouth	Requires Improvement
Health Visiting – Devon County Council	Good

In addition to the CQC’s ratings of maternity services, annual surveys seeking to understand the experiences of pregnant women and people found in 2023 the level of care at NHS trusts in Devon were ‘about the same’ compared with other trusts nationally, with the exception of ‘labour and birth’ experiences at University Hospital Plymouth NHS Trust and Torbay and South Devon Foundation Trust which were rated ‘better than expected’.

The 2022 CQC inspection of Devon’s Health Visiting service identified outstanding examples of practice, whilst acknowledging the main challenges to the service of staffing shortages, performance issues, and difficulties with the interface between clinical management systems.

### **Ofsted**

#### **SEND**

A 2018 inspection of SEND services by Ofsted identified significant weaknesses. These predominantly centred around the completion and quality of education, health, and care (EHC) plans, identification and assessment of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), poor communication with parents, and a lack of strategic clarity amongst stakeholders. A second inspection was carried out in 2022 to review progress and improvements, however this found that insufficient progress had been made to address the weaknesses identified. Details of the Ofsted inspection can be found [here](#).

#### **Childrens Social Care**

An Ofsted inspection of children’s social care services in 2020 identified serious failures in the service provision, which are summarised below:

**Table 4: Summary of Ofsted ratings**

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate

Ofsted have carried out six additional monitoring visits since the 2020 inspection to drive forward improvements in children’s social care services across Devon. The details of the findings can be found at [DCC - Ofsted inspection reports](#).

### *Early Years and School*

**Table 5: Proportion of settings by Ofsted rating (%)**

Setting type	No. of settings	Rating	Proportion of settings
<b>Early Years (day nurseries and pre-schools)</b>	209	Outstanding	17%
		Good	80%
		Requires Improvement	2%
		Inadequate	0.5%
<b>Schools</b>	429	Outstanding	8%
		Good	69%
		Requires Improvement	10%
		Inadequate	1%
		No rating available	12%

In terms of the quality of the available childcare, the report also found there has been a slight decrease in the number of providers graded as ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted, indicative of the current recruitment difficulties and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children’s social and emotional development.

## **Appendix 4: Websites & Resources**

## **Childcare & Education**

[Family Information Service - Devon County Council](#)

[Early years funding and help with childcare costs – Education and Families \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)

[For providers - Information for childcare providers \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)

[Working in early years and childcare - Information for childcare providers \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)

[Childcare Sufficiency Assessment - Information for childcare providers \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)

[Education Health and Care Plans \(EHCPs\) in Devon](#)

[Ordinarily Available Inclusive Education Framework - Support for schools and settings \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)

## **Services**

[Early Help - Devon Safeguarding Children Partnership \(devonscp.org.uk\)](#)

[The Devon Safeguarding Children Partnership \(Devon SCP\)](#)

[Your Health Visiting Service - Devon | Health for Under5s](#)

## **SEND**

[About the SEND Local Offer - Find out about support for SEND in Devon](#)

[Devon's SEND strategy - Education and Families](#)

## **Legislation**

[Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Children Act 1989 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[Children Act 2004 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[Education and Inspections Act 2006 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[Childcare Act 2016 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[Children and Families Act 2014 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

## **Guidance & Policy**

[The best start for life: a vision for the 1,001 critical days - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

## **Appendix 5: Glossary of terms**

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**



Potentially traumatic events and experiences that occur in childhood that have lasting impacts. This can include, but is not limited to, experiencing physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; physical or emotional neglect; parental mental health difficulties; parental substance misuse problems; parental separation/divorce; bullying; parental imprisonment. ACEs can affect physiological and psychological responses to stress and are associated with physical and mental wellbeing challenges throughout life.

### **Best Start for Life**

A vision for improving support for families from conception to age two, to ensure every baby in England has the best possible start. It recognises this period as a fundamental part of improving health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities.

### **Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)**

Child Criminal Exploitation describes when children and young people are exploited and manipulated into illegal activity.

### **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**

Child Sexual Exploitation is a type of sexual abuse when a child or young person is coerced, manipulated, or deceived into sexual activity in exchange for gifts, money, drugs, status, or affection.

### **CQC (Care Quality Commission)**

The CQC is the independent regulator of health and social care in England.

### **Early Help**

A collaborative and integrated way of working between a range of different services and teams. The focus is the whole family to make improvements for all as soon as possible when help is needed, to meet the needs of the family being experienced at that time.

### **Early Learning Goals**

Early Learning Goals are targets for children to achieve by the end of Reception year. There are 17 goals in the categories of communication and language; personal, social, and emotional development; physical development; literacy; mathematics; understanding the world; and expressive arts and design.

### **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)**

The EYFS covers the education of children until the end of Reception year at school. The EYFS framework sets out the standards for development, learning, and care of children, and applies to all schools and Ofsted registered early years providers.

### **Early Years Foundation Stage Profile**

The EYFS profile is a statutory assessment of children's development at the end of the early years foundation stage, before starting school. It is an assessment in the 17 Early Learning Goals based on the professional judgement of teacher's knowledge of each child, and provides a representation of each child's development to support their transition into Year 1.

### **Early Years System**

The Early Years System comprises all stakeholders who have a responsibility or duty, or who provide services or support for parents/carers, children, young people, and families. This includes parents/carers themselves, statutory services, and voluntary and community sector organisations.

### **Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)**

An EHCP is a legally binding document that outlines a child or young person's special educational, health, or social care needs.

### **Family Hubs**

Local community assets home to a range of professionals, organisations, and services, designed to support families with children and young people aged 0-19, extending to 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Family Hubs serve as a one-stop-shop to make it easier to get help and services in a way that is accessible, better connected, and relationship centred.

### **Formal childcare**

Formal childcare refers to Ofsted registered childcare and education providers, including schools, day nurseries, preschools, and childminders; wraparound care for school-age children e.g., breakfast clubs; and Independent schools.

### **Free School Meals (FSM)**

Free School Meals is a means tested government scheme to provide meals in educational settings to children, primarily from low-income families. Universal FSM are provided however to all children until the end of Key Stage 1 (Year 2).

### **Informal childcare**

An arrangement where care is provided by grandparents, relatives, friends, or a babysitter outside of Ofsted registered childcare providers.

### **Ofsted (Office For Standard in Education, Children's Services, and Skills)**

Ofsted inspects and regulates organisations and individuals providing education, training, and care in the UK. Childcare and educational settings are subject to Ofsted inspections and required to meet criteria, and are rated based on performance.

### **One Devon Integrated Care Board (ICB)**

The One Devon ICB is a collaboration of the NHS and local councils, as well as a range of other organisations such as the voluntary and community sector, who are working together to improve the lives of people in Devon.

### **Parents/carers**

We use this term in the strategy to describe a person who is responsible for looking after a child or young person. This includes but is not limited to parents, carers, legal guardians, foster carers, primary and secondary care givers, and birthing and non-birthing parents.

### **Restorative Practice**

Restorative Practice is about supporting strong, meaningful, trusting, and respectful relationships, and repairing relationships when risk, challenge, or harm arises that impacts on the wellbeing of children. The framework comprises the 'Five R's' of Relational, Responsibility, Respect, Resilience, and Reflective.

### **School readiness**

Refers to how ready children are to start school in Year 1 in terms of their social, physical, and cognitive development.

### **Sufficient childcare**

Is a local authority duty to provide enough childcare places to meet the needs of parents to help them to take up work or access education or training as well as providing enough early learning funded places for eligible 2 year olds, and all 3 and 4 year olds.

### **Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**

A child or young person has special educational needs and disabilities if they have a learning difficulty and/or a disability that means they need health and education support.

### **The Balanced System Framework**

A whole system, outcome based framework that can be used to understand, plan, and evaluate services to support children and young people. The framework emerged from work to support children and young people with speech, language, and communication needs.

### **Transition**

Refers to the changes that children experience as they move from one educational setting or stage to another. This period can have a significant impact on academic, social, and emotional development.

### **Trauma Informed**

Trauma informed practice recognises that trauma can affect individuals, groups, and communities. In trauma informed practice the impact of trauma on people is understood, and the aim is to create a safe, empowering, and positive environment to support the person based on their needs, and avoid re-traumatisation.