

# Slough early help strategy 2026-29



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## Foreword

We are delighted to introduce our new Early Help Strategy which sets out the collective vision and strategic priorities for Early Help in Slough for 2026-2029.

As a partnership we recognise everyone needs extra help sometimes and our belief is that help should be easily accessible, easy to navigate and offers the right support at the right time to children, young people and their families.

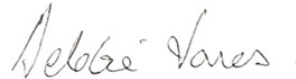
This builds on the previous Early Help Strategy 2023-2025 and maintains the overarching vision to 'ensure that children, young people and their families receive the right help at the right time' (Working Together, 2023).

We aim to build a culture in Slough where children, young people and families are supported through needs led conversations, focusing on the strengths of the family, and seeking to support where extra help is needed, ensuring children are central to any decisions being made.

In writing this strategy we have listened to the views of children, young people, and families, undertaken through a series of engagement events between April and August 2025.


This renewed strategy sets out our ongoing commitment and drive to work with communities and families to improve outcomes for our children and young people.

■ **DCS/CEx Slough Children First – Debbie Jones**



■ **Director, Children, Family and All Age Services (CFAA) and Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**

**(BHFT) – Karen Cridland**



■ **TVP Chief Superintendent – Steve Raffield**



■ **Slough CVS CEO – Asma Asiz**



## Our early help vision

Continuing to echo both the vision of Slough Borough Council (SBC)'s strategic priorities and Slough Children First (SCF)'s vision and strategic priorities, we want to ensure that “**children and young people in Slough feel happy, safe and loved within their families and wider community where they are helped to thrive, not just survive.**”



**Happy**



**Safe and loved**



**Thriving**

This strategy affirms that:

‘Children and their families should be able to easily access early help and know where to go and who to speak to when they need it.’

‘Children and young people will be enabled to participate and shape services with us.’

‘We will work in partnership with colleagues across the Council and all services that work with children, young people and their families’.

Building on the previous 2023-2025 strategy, we aim to ensure that children, young people and their families can easily access the right support at the right time, and that, as a partnership, practitioners are equipped and able to support children and their families when needs arise, ensuring that every conversation counts.

As a partnership, we collectively agree that early help support should be accessible for all at the earliest opportunity and easy to navigate.

The provision of early help is an approach which relies upon organisations and agencies working together to provide the right support at the right time to children, young people and families.

All levels of support prior to statutory and specialist services make up our early help offer:

**Universal support** - the provision of services available to all children, young people, and families, enabling self-access and meeting general needs, e.g. school education, GP

**Community/partnership early support** - some children, young people, and families may need more structured early support to help them with parenting and/or challenging times to meet needs at the earliest opportunity and to prevent needs from escalating - we call this community and partnership early support

**Targeted support** - additional support through a plan developed as a team around the family, if early support doesn't improve the situation and complex and multiple needs require a family help assessment

### **What children and young people can expect from our early help offer:**

- I will feel happy, safe and loved and supported to thrive.
- I am recognised as an individual and am free from any discrimination.
- I will be at the centre of all decisions and will only need to tell my story once.
- My voice will be heard and will influence the planning of help and services.

### **What parents, carers and families can expect from our early help offer:**

- I am recognised as an individual who has unique characteristics and needs, and I am free from discrimination.
- The needs of all of my family are recognised.
- My views and opinions are listened to.
- I am encouraged and empowered to support my family.
- It is recognised that some of my past and current experiences may impact me as a parent.
- It will be understood that I may need support with other areas of my life in order to understand the needs of those in my family.



**What professionals and organisations can expect from our early help offer:**

- I understand my role and responsibilities in relation to the early help offer in Slough.
- I am empowered to take responsibility to ensure that children, young people and families receive the support they need.
- I have access to training and support.

## Our early help journey, achievements to date

Since our last strategy, we, as a partnership, have continued to develop our early help offer. The achievements below outline the increased support and subsequent reach that have been achieved:

- An **enhanced specification for the Targeted Early Help Service**, meaning that targeted early help would be supporting those children and families where there are multiple needs requiring a coordinated response and ensuring partners are supported with advice and guidance to access support in the community. Between January 2023 and September 2025, our Targeted Early Help Service supported 6489 children and 3468 families.
  - We have **continued to develop both the Family Information Services (FIS) website and the SEND local offer**, to ensure families can access the right support at the right time.
  - We have continued to **work as a partnership** to build on the wealth and diversity of support that is available within and of our communities, harnessing the support of our vibrant Community and Voluntary Sector. Slough CVS has over 500 groups supporting children, young people, adults and communities across our borough.
  - March 2023 saw the **launch of the CVS Community Directory** supporting children, young people and parents/carers to access activities available within their community.
  - We have **reviewed our pathways for support for children with emotional health and wellbeing** by providing direct referral access to our “Getting Help” CAMHS service. Previously, referrals to this service came via the SCF Front Door and Targeted Early Help. Children, young people, parents/ carers and professionals can now refer directly to the service to meet their needs at the earliest opportunity.
  - Increasing our Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) in schools. **Our MHSTs operate across 32 schools within Slough**, plus NEET and Slough Virtual School. Our MHSTs have directly supported 449 children and young people, with the Getting Help Team supporting 215 children and young people.
- Mental health early support for children and young People under 18 in GP Services – **CAMHS, in partnership with LOCC PCN, has been piloting Mental Health early support in Langley, Orchard, Cippenham, and Chapel GP practices**. Children and young people under 18 have been able to request an appointment with the CAMHS mental health practitioner, who has been offering early help and advice to those who have had worries about their emotional or mental health.



- Counselling support from [Number 22 Counselling](#) has reached [over 500 children and young people \(in Slough\) in 2024/25](#), working in schools, in their rooms in Church Street and online, providing timely access to young people with emotional health and mental health needs.
- We have [developed our delegation portal](#) to enable reporting on the transition from targeted early help to partnership and community early help. Our Early Help Coordinator has facilitated multi-agency training to partners and tracks the progress of plans every 3 months.
- Our Early Help Champions Group has continued to be facilitated by the Early Help Adviser with an average of 30 attendees at each group from across the partnership. [Early Help Surgeries continued to be utilised](#) and were re-launched from September 2025.
- We have [updated our digital parenting offer](#) so that parents are able to access parenting support at the earliest point.
- Together with the CVS and Faith Leaders, we co-produced our [‘Knowing Me... Knowing You...’ networking event](#) (February 2025) to bring together Faith, Community Leaders, the Community, Voluntary Sector, SCF and SBC services for children and young people, focusing on sharing information, knowledge, insight and data.
- Our Community and Detached Youth Work Team provide [street-based outreach](#), engagement in hotspot areas, school sessions, creative engagement and one-to-one mentoring. They build relationships in the community to support positive interactions by being present in multiple contexts – taking support to where young people are. Across the core areas of delivery, the team have engaged with 4,303 young people between 2023 and 2025.
- The [delivery of the Holidays, Activities and Food \(HAF\) project](#) and Summer fun days for families in the past year, which benefited 1,700 children and young people.
- Responses to need in local areas through targeted detached work have resulted in [reductions of anti-social behaviour](#) in areas such as Colnbrook and Chalvey, with an increase in delivery of positive activities for children targeted in different locations and communities.
- The [development of our response to child exploitation as a partnership has been strengthened](#) through the development of the Exploitation and Harms Outside the Home Strategy, which followed on from the Early Help Partnership Strategy due to the increased risks to children identified.
- [Creation and development of a toolkit](#) for primary-aged children as victims of domestic abuse.
- The roll out of [family network meeting training](#) to all targeted early help practitioners within SCF.
- Home Start Berkshire East have provided over 3000 volunteer hours and have supported over 900 children (between April 2024 and March 2025) with a [noticeable increase in self-referrals](#) (30% of all referrals).
- Slough and Family Wellbeing service has [established School Nurse Champions](#) to support developing youth-friendly health and care services; provision of age-appropriate advice and support in relation to health and unhealthy relationships; promotion of the importance of understanding the impact of bullying and the tools to speak up; and development of a school nursing offer for children electively educated at home.

## National context

The statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (2023) emphasises the importance of providing support at the earliest opportunity to prevent problems from escalating.

The evidence-base, including findings from the Munro Review of Child Protection, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, and research from the Early Intervention Foundation, demonstrates that timely, coordinated help can improve life chances, reduce demand on high-cost crisis services, and build sustainable family and community capacity.

National policy continues to highlight the value of prevention and family support, emphasised with the development of Best Start in Life Family Hubs.

In July 2025, the government announced their 10-year health plan to reinvent the health service through three shifts: hospital to community, analogue to digital, and sickness to prevention.

National inspection and accountability frameworks reinforce this direction.

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission assess how effectively agencies work together to identify needs early and provide proportionate, coordinated support. Local authorities are expected to show that early help is well-embedded across the partnership, with clear pathways, shared responsibilities, and measurable impact.

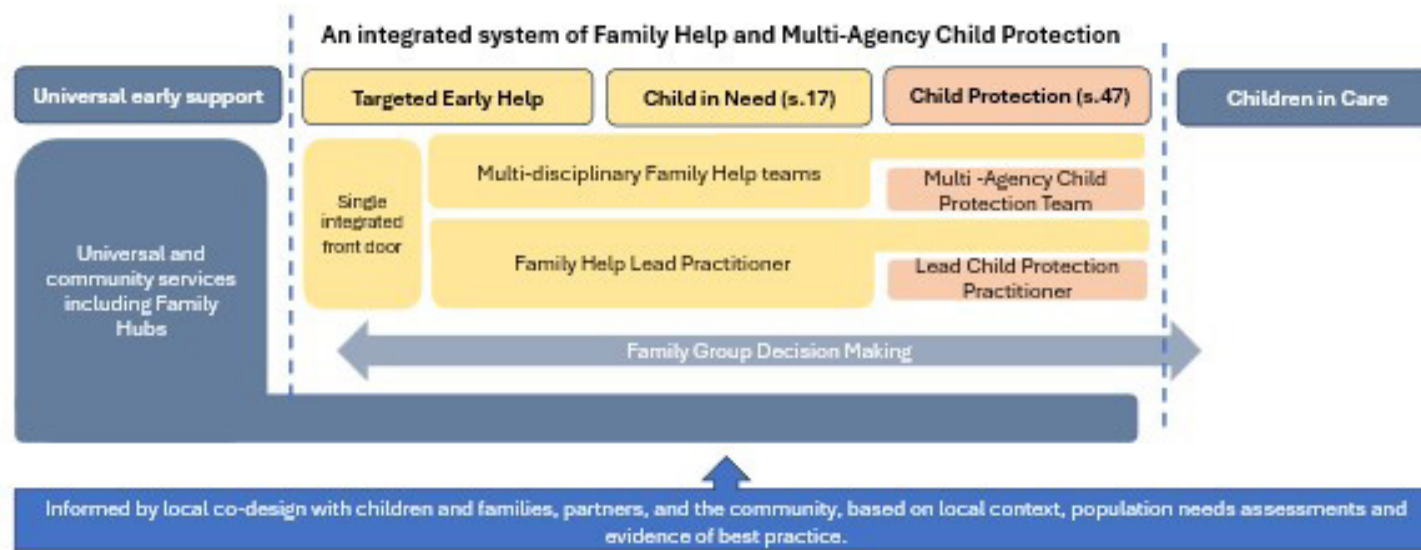
### **Families First reforms**

This strategy was written at a time of ongoing transformation as we are co-producing our local approach in response to the DfE Families First Reforms.

This will see a greater focus on early support and needs-led conversations, emphasising our collective responsibility for children and families to be able to access the right help at the right time at the right level of need by the right practitioner.

This requires greater collaboration between partner agencies, including the voluntary and community sector and a greater focus on mobilising family and community networks. Slough has a rich community, voluntary and faith sector, and we want to ensure these are recognised and valued, particularly for those children and families who access them or who may be unaware of local services.

A key aspect of the reforms will be the development of a new Family Help model, which will see the merging of Targeted Early Help and Child in Need Services to form our Family Help Service, ensuring families have a consistent Family Help Lead Practitioner bringing together Social Workers, Family Support Workers and Targeted Early Help Workers.



Our outcomes for our Family Help approach are;

- Children thrive
- Children’s views and lived experience is known, understood and acted upon
- Children’s needs are met at the earliest opportunity
- Families are supported to stay safely together
- Families receive timely help and support
- Families feel listened to, respected and lead their own plans
- Families feel supported by our communities that care
- Children and families receive effective help

As we develop our Family Help Service, we are also building on our arrangements and capacity at the SCF Front Door to have more conversations and dialogue with referrers to better understand the needs of children, young people and families to ensure that children, young people and families are supported by the right service, including partnership early help.

To enable this, we have recruited a Service Manager, additional Senior Social Workers, a Targeted Early Help Manager and a Community Connector role.

## United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a legally-binding international agreement that sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities.

The UNCRC consists of 54 articles that set out children's rights and how governments should work together to make them available to all children.

Under the terms of the convention, governments are required to meet children's basic needs and help them reach their full potential. Central to this is the acknowledgement that every child has basic fundamental rights.

These include the right to:

- Life, survival and development
- Protection from violence, abuse or neglect
- An education that enables children to fulfil their potential
- Be raised by, or have a relationship with, their parents
- Express their opinions and be listened to



Whilst the National Supporting Families Framework has ceased to exist as a standalone, it continues to provide a clear set of outcomes and retains its focus on a whole family approach.

In this context, our local Early Help Strategy sets out how partners will respond to these national expectations, ensuring that families in our area receive the right support, at the right time, from the right service.



## Local context

The local context of Slough is varied from our neighbouring local authorities. This includes levels of deprivation and government funding, along with the continual financial pressures facing the council, which are contributing factors.

Slough is more deprived than the England average on the 2019 index of multiple deprivation, with 5.6% claiming unemployment benefits. The town also has the second youngest population in the country, pockets of high-level deprivation, and we serve a diverse population who speak 150 languages. However, we acknowledge and celebrate where we have seen success with children in Slough exceeding the national average for attainment at Key Stage 2 and 70.8% of children reaching a good level of development by age 5.

In the 12 months up to November 2025, there were **8579** contacts received into SCF, out of which **1911** resulted in a referral to Targeted Early Help, with primary referral reasons being Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing and Parenting difficulties, equating to 15.7% and 9.1% respectively.

The challenges faced within Slough are particular and outline why we need to provide high quality early help to those families who need this.

Slough is more deprived than the England average on the 2019 index of multiple deprivation, with 5.6% claiming unemployment benefits

21% of children live in relatively low-income families

27.3% of slough residents do not use English as their main language

70.8% of children reach a Good Level of Development (GLD) by age 5

10.1% of people in Slough claim housing benefits

Total recorded crime is higher than the national average (per 1,000 population)

25% of Slough's residents are aged 0-15 and Slough has the second largest proportion of children aged 15 or under in England and Wales

93.8% of 16-17 years olds in Slough are in education or training

Obesity levels in our children in year 6 are higher than local levels

## What our children, young people and families have told us

To support us with developing our strategy, we have consulted with children, young people and their parents, who have told us the key areas they would like support with.

**Children and young people have told us they want support for:**

Knowing what services are available

*Life skills*

**Bullying**

**Job and university applications**

*Peer pressure*

*Support for mental health*

Racism

Parents/carers have told us they want:

More support at the right time

More children's centre activities

Practitioner familiarity with the local area

*To be able to talk to staff when needed*

More accessible activities for children with disabilities

Parenting classes

Capacity to offer health-related advice

*To be able to source relevant information when needed*

# Best Start in Life

Investing in support for families during the early years delivers long-term benefits for children, communities, and the economy.

Parents are their child's first and most influential educators, and equipping them with the right knowledge and resources is critical to improving life chances.

This means ensuring access to high-quality pregnancy and early health services, parenting support, baby classes, and early education and childcare. Strong links between health and education cannot be overstated - healthy children learn more effectively, and those who achieve well in education are far more likely to go on to live healthier lives.

The "Best Start in Life" is the UK government's comprehensive strategy to improve early childhood development and ensure all children have the chance to achieve their full potential. The strategy focuses on improving family services, making early education more accessible, and enhancing the quality of care provided from pregnancy to age five.

Key components of the Best Start in Life Strategy include:

## **Integrated family support:** The rollout of Slough's "Best Start Family Hubs"



Slough has designated three current Children's Centres, which will develop into Family Hubs. They will expand in the services for families and offer 0-19 (0-25 years with SEND) will act as "one-stop-shops" Best Start Family Hubs will bring together professionals from health and education, and will work with nurseries, childminders, schools, health services, libraries and local voluntary and community and faith groups –overseen by multi-agency cross partnership governance board and smaller locality operating boards.

Parents will see a clearer, more consistent, evidence-based offering that will help them with their child's development. Parents will see greater opportunities to access services in their communities, with clearer, more accessible offers for parenting support. They will have a strong focus on supporting home learning with a primary focus on 0-5 years.

- **Accessible and affordable childcare:** Sufficient places for families to access early education, supporting children in Slough to access 30 hours of funded childcare entitlement for working parents, making it easily accessible.
- **Improved health services:** Strengthening maternity and health visiting services, increasing access to vaccinations, and implementing measures to reduce tooth decay in children.
- **Local accountability:** Slough will be required to develop their own “Best Start local plans” with a goal for 78% of five-year-olds to reach a good level of development by 2028.

For further information, review alongside ‘Best Start in Life Strategy’.



## Support with being a parent

It is not easy being a parent, and yet research tells us about the importance of good parenting support and how this is linked to improving children's outcomes.

As part of our Early Help Strategy, we recognise the importance of creating a safe, nurturing environment to foster a child's positive development and well-being.

Through consistent positive practices, which will build a child's self-esteem, resilience and ability to handle future challenges, it is our aim that through an enhanced parenting offer, this will lead to better family dynamics, improved communication and ultimately help prepare children for adulthood and independence.

In Slough, specialist targeted parenting is already available, as part of our special educational needs and disability local offer, and specialist targeted provision through our Youth Justice Service (YJS). This is alongside the digital offer of Solihull parenting; however, we are aware that parenting challenges have continued to be a need within this borough.

**Over a 12 month period between 2024-2025, SCF received 2651 contacts where parenting challenges were a factor.**

We want to ensure that parents can access a range of parenting courses both face to face as well as online, we recognise the challenge in finding easily accessible courses and therefore as part of our strategy we want to ensure parents are able to access parenting support at the earliest point.

Development of Best Start in Life Family Hubs will support with offering evidence-based parenting programmes and utilising and drawing on the strength and skills across the partnership we will seek to develop a bespoke parenting offer for residents within Slough ensuring the diverse needs of our community are met in a unique personable and interactive way, which are accessible for all.

### Review of parenting support

In July 2025, we completed a multi-agency skills audit of the current workforce across the partnership to establish the offer of support to parents and carers in Slough.

Of the findings, only 10% of the respondents are currently delivering any parenting support. Half of those surveyed who have received parenting training agree that it's had the biggest impact on their role. Over 80% of those surveyed wish to be trained in parenting support programmes.

As part of our parenting offer, we will seek to:

- Strengthen availability and accessibility of general information and advice to parents.
- Ensure there is a clear focus on early help and prevention.
- To improve the cohesiveness of parenting support across Slough.

Our overall aims:

- We want to ensure good quality universal parenting support is developed and delivered in our local communities.
- We want to develop the provision of targeted specialist parenting for families supported through statutory intervention and the established parenting offer through our YJS.
- Ensure information is easily accessible relating to parenting support across Slough to raise awareness of the parenting offer.
- Strengthen the availability of evidence-based parenting support.

We will take action to:

- Take a coordinated multi-agency approach to the planning and delivering of parenting in Slough.
- Work with partners to agree a bespoke parenting offer in the shape of workshops and face to face and online course delivery.
- Ensure resources focus on meeting families' needs at the earliest point, ensuring that the parenting offer is accessible to families from global majority including the availability of resources and information.

We will want to see:

- Increased opportunity for parents to access a range of parenting support from conception.
- An increase in number of families accessing parenting.
- Parents who complete a parenting course/ workshop will report an increase in their parenting confidence.

## Early help priorities

We have outlined below our collectively agreed priorities over the next three years which we will use to agree an early help partnership strategy action plan.



### **Promote prevention and early intervention**

Intervene swiftly to prevent escalation, with the development and roll out of an early help needs-led conversation.

Further development of the FIS with the recruitment of a dedicated manager.

Embedding early help and a Community Connector role in the integrated Front Door to ensure information, advice and guidance can be offered at the right time.

Embedding and promotion of the CAMHS training offer to practitioners working with children, young people, and families.

Launch of an additional Mental Health Support Team, resulting in three fully operational by 2026.

Launch of Silvercloud (online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for parents of anxious children).

Re-launch of the multi-agency CYP Emotional wellbeing and Mental Health network meeting.

Informed by early help needs-led conversations, to identify and address emerging absence patterns before they escalate into persistent attendance issues.

Public Health launch of the Slough Healthy Schools Award.



## **Best Start in Life Strategy**

Develop and deliver a service that meets the criteria for designation as Family Hubs.

Develop an offer for families with children aged 12-19 and up to 25 with SEND.

Expansion of the digital offer of early support and intervention through the Family Information Service (FIS).

Further enhance the system that tracks, monitors and reports better utilisation of services.

Working with the wider community to improve breastfeeding rates by implementing and leading the Baby Friendly Programme.



## **Ensure access to timely and accessible parenting support**

Offering joined-up support tailored to the unique needs of Slough's diverse communities, both in face-to-face format as well as online, to support with the development of both parenting and home learning.

We will deliver evidence-based and research informed parenting intervention.



## **Empower communities**

Ensure families know where to turn for help.

Further enhancement and development of the community directory.

Greater cohesion between statutory services, community and voluntary services and the faith sector.



## **Embed a whole-family approach with family led decision making**

Recognise and build on family strengths.

Ensure children and their families with support from their wider support network take the lead in making decisions to best meet the needs of their children.

We will have shared methods for measuring the impact of our collective support work across early help.



### **Measuring impact**

We will ensure children and families have the opportunity to share their experiences of services and support with planning future developments.

## How will we know we have made a difference?

We will know we are making a difference when these key measures have been carried out:

More reporting

More families report they get help at the right time.

Front door  
reductions

Reduction in contacts to the front door, meaning the families are supported by those who already know them.

More conversations

Increase in early help needs conversations.

Less statutory social  
care intervention

Fewer children require statutory social care intervention.

Statutory social  
work assessment  
decrease

Reduction in the number of statutory social work assessments which result in closure or no further action.

Family Hub usage  
increase

Increased numbers of families accessing Best Start in Life Family Hubs.

GLD results increase

A yearly increase in the GLD results at the end of reception, particularly for our most disadvantaged children, with a target of 78.1% by 2028 and 71% for disadvantaged children.

Attendance increase  
in parenting  
programmes

Number of parents who have attended parenting workshops and evidence-based parenting programmes.

Increased  
confidence

Practitioners report increased confidence in identifying and supporting need.

Ownership of  
information and  
accessibility

A cross-partnership collective agreement to take ownership of and ensure information contained within the Family Information Services is up to date and accessible.

## Governance

The delivery of Slough's Early Help Strategy has been endorsed by the multi-agency Child and Young People's partnership Board, who will continue to monitor our early help offer and subsequent outcomes for children, young people and families.

The board feeds into the Slough Health and Wellbeing Board for strategic oversight. Partnership agencies will use their own internal governance arrangements for oversight or specific outcomes and actions.

We will seek to consult regularly on our early help offer with children, young people, families and professionals at both a strategic and operational level, which, along with data and the changing local context, will support review and subsequent developments of our strategy.



