

PART B – Equality Analysis Form

As a public authority we need to ensure that all our strategies, policies, service and functions, both current and proposed have given proper consideration to equality and diversity.

This form:

- Can be used to prompt discussions, ensure that due regard has been given and remove or minimise disadvantage for an individual or group with a protected characteristic
- Involves looking at what steps can be taken to advance and maximise equality as well as eliminate discrimination and negative consequences
- Should be completed before decisions are made, this will remove the need for remedial actions.

Note – An Initial Equality Screening Assessment (Part A) should be completed prior to this form.

When completing this form consider the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics Age, Disability, Sex, Gender Reassignment, Race, Religion or Belief, Sexual Orientation, Civil Partnerships and Marriage, Pregnancy and Maternity and other socio-economic groups e.g. parents, single parents and guardians, carers, looked after children, unemployed and people on low incomes, ex-offenders, victims of domestic violence, homeless people etc. – see page 11 of Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance.

1. Title	
Equality Analysis title: Best Start Plan 2026 - 2029	
Date of Equality Analysis (EA): 04 February 2026	
Directorate: CYPS	Service area: Commissioning, Quality & Performance
Lead Manager: Helen Sweaton	Contact number: 07554 436546
Is this a: ☒ Strategy / Policy ☐ Service / Function ☐ Other	
If other, please specify	

2. Names of those involved in the Equality Analysis (Should include minimum of three people) - see page 7 of Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance

Name	Organisation	Role (eg service user, managers, service specialist)
Helen Sweaton	RMBC/ NHS SY	Service Director Commissioning, Performance and Quality
Kelly White	RMBC	Service Director Family Help
Niall Devlin		Service Director Education and Inclusion
Alex Hawley	RMBC	Public Health Consultant
Michael Ng	RMBC	Strategic Commissioning Manager (Public Health)

3. What is already known? - see page 10 of Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance

Aim/Scope (who the Policy/Service affects and intended outcomes if known)

This may include a group/s identified by a protected characteristic, others groups or stakeholder/s e.g. service users, employees, partners, members, suppliers etc.)

The DfE issued targets for Local Authorities (LAs) to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) as part of its "Best Start in Life" strategy, aiming for 75% of 5-year-olds nationally to reach GLD by 2028 issuing new data tools and funding to guide local planning and intervention.

This report provides an overview of current activity across Rotherham to improve early years outcomes, tackling inequalities, and ensure all children, especially disadvantaged ones, get a strong foundation for school, contributing to the Council's wider ambition that children and young people achieve.

The report outlines the key activity undertaken in developing the new Best Start Plan, including a comprehensive needs analysis, engagement and consultation.

The report seeks approval of the Best Start Plan and outlines the timeline for implementation to achieve the ambitions identified.

Priorities

The Best Start plan will support children in Rotherham and their families to improve early years outcomes. Tackling inequalities, to ensure all children, especially disadvantaged ones, get a strong foundation for school, contributing to the Council's wider ambition that children and young people achieve.

The target for the general population across Rotherham is to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028 for at least 73.3% of 5-year-olds, however this must include at least 56.6% of 5-year-olds eligible for Free School Meals (FSM).

Research highlights that certain groups are disproportionately vulnerable due to underlying inequalities. These inequalities increase the likelihood of not achieving outcomes.

This plan reflects Rotherham's commitment to unite efforts across the Borough to enhance early years experiences and create a more equitable future for all.

Priorities

- Strengthening early communication, language and literacy for all children
- Increasing early education access for disadvantaged children
- Improving the quality of early years provision, including Reception for all children
- Identifying needs early and supporting children with SEND and vulnerable families
- Providing joined-up family support through our Family Hubs
- Tackling inequalities across the 0–5 system

What equality information is available? (Include any engagement undertaken)

- 90.7% children received their mandated health review at 2-2.5 years
- 88.2% of children meet developmental expectations at their mandated health review at 2-2.5 years
- 29.1% of Rotherham pupils were eligible for free school meals
- 23.5% of pupils have either a statutory plan for Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND), known as an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), or are receiving SEND support (previously known as school action and school action plus).
- 64.3% of children achieved a good level of development, however this reduced to 47.6% for children eligible for free school meals.
- 67.8% of children achieve expected levels in writing and 72.1% achieve expected levels in word reading.
- 22.2% of children remain at emerging levels in Communication and Language.
- A gender gap persists, with boys significantly less likely to achieve GLD than girls (56.4% vs 72.3%).
- 39% of male children eligible for free school meals achieved a good level of development
- Rotherham has a higher proportion of children with identified SEND than the national average, with 20.4% of pupils recorded as having SEND, compared with 17.1% nationally.

- In the most recent term, 72% of eligible 2-year-olds with SEND took up a funded early education place, increasing to 93.3% among 3 and 4-year-olds.
- 89% of children aged 0–5 registered with a family hub, rising to 92% in the 30% most deprived areas.
- 73% of all 0–5s and 78% of those in the most deprived neighbourhoods access children centre services.
- 85.7% to 96.6% (across the academic year) of 2-year-olds, take-up an early education place. 90.6% to 97% 3 - and 4-year-olds take-up their universal entitlement to early education. However 12.9% of disadvantaged 3 and 4-year-olds did not take up a place compared with 8.9% in more affluent areas. 100% of children in care take-up early education entitlements. Take-up of early education has a positive impact on outcomes for children.
- Around 3,900 people (a rate of 3.3%) aged 16 and over in Rotherham were unemployed in the year ending December 2023. This has decreased compared with the year ending December 2022 (4.0%) and is better when compared to 3.4% across Yorkshire and The Humber.
- Data on the rate of children who have been referred to social care (per 10,000 children in each area) and are on a child protection plan shows a continued safe and steady decline. Low child protection rates are good. Rotherham has seen a reduction from a peak in 2017 of 114.3 to 70 at the end of March 2023.
- Healthy life expectancy at birth, 2018-2020, in Rotherham is 58.7 years for a male, 56.5 years for a female, significantly lower than the England average of 63.1 and 63.9 respectively.

Are there any gaps in the information that you are aware of?

Ethnicity data is limited and offers no themes from trend analysis however this could be considered in more detail particularly when multiple inequalities are present.

What monitoring arrangements have you made to monitor the impact of the policy or service on communities/groups according to their protected characteristics?

Progress against the delivery plan and review of objectives will be undertaken regularly by the Best Start and Beyond Steering Group and overseen annually by Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Board.

Engagement undertaken with customers. (date and group(s) consulted and key findings)	On the 1st December 2025 a Summit led by Rotherham Council brought together multi-agency partners, aiming to foster collaborative discussion and actionable strategies for improving early years development outcomes. Presentations provided a comprehensive needs analysis with a range of quantitative and qualitative information, including feedback from children and families, delivered by Children and Young People's Services, Early Years Education and 0-19 Public Health. Participants engaged in two workshops: the first focusing on current practices and the second on generating ideas for doing things differently. The summit concluded by agreeing the appropriate next steps, informing the development of the Best Start Plan. The Summit captured examples of current activity evidencing delivery of a comprehensive early year's support system through integrated health checks, family engagement, robust multi-agency delivery including a vibrant voluntary and community sector and workforce development. Collectively, these actions aim to improve school readiness, reduce inequalities, and foster strong home learning environments. This engagement informed the development of the Best Start Plan.
Engagement undertaken with staff (date and group(s) consulted and key findings)	A number of RMBC staff were involved in the Summit referenced above.

4. The Analysis - of the actual or likely effect of the Policy or Service (Identify by protected characteristics)

How does the Policy/Service meet the needs of different communities and groups? *(Protected characteristics of Age, Disability, Sex, Gender Reassignment, Race, Religion or Belief, Sexual Orientation, Civil Partnerships and Marriage, Pregnancy and Maternity) - see glossary on page 14 of the Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance)*

The Best Start Plan describes how partners will work together to ensure continued progress towards the achievement of the DfE issued target to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) so that 73% of 5-year-olds across Rotherham reach GLD by 2028. The plan targets all children not achieving a good level of development, specifically aiming to improve take up of universal health and development reviews, promote universal activities, SEND updates and communications to strengthen communication and literacy, reading and writing, and increase the take up of early education.

The plan acknowledges that some children face deeper inequalities, such as those who are male and those living in areas of higher deprivation.

Protected characteristics, including disability, sex, race, age, religion, and sexual orientation, are carefully considered to ensure fair access to services and opportunities.

Does your Policy/Service present any problems or barriers to communities or Groups?

No

Does the Service/Policy provide any positive impact/s including improvements or remove barriers?

Based on the analysis of local need; the following priorities are identified:

1. Strengthening early communication, language and literacy for all children
We know that communication and language are the biggest drivers of school readiness. Improving early speech, language and literacy is central to our ambition to increase the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development.

2. Increasing early education access for disadvantaged children

While many families take up funded early education places, too many children in our most disadvantaged communities still miss out – including 12.9% of 3–4-year-olds in IMD 30% areas. Closing this gap is essential to closing our GLD gap.

3. Improving the quality of early years provision, including Reception for all children

The first years of education shape life chances. We will work with providers, childminders, schools, Stronger Practice Hubs and RISE to improve practice, strengthen transitions and raise outcomes for all children.

4. Identifying needs early and supporting children with SEND and vulnerable families

With SEND prevalence above national levels and rising EHCP demand, we must act earlier and more collaboratively to ensure children get the right help at the right time – reducing escalation and improving long-term outcomes.

5. Providing joined-up family support through our Family Hubs

Rotherham's Family Hubs network is already strong. Through these hubs we will offer integrated health, early help, childcare and community support so families experience a seamless pathway from pregnancy to school age.

6. Tackling inequalities across the 0–5 system

We are determined to narrow the gaps linked to deprivation, SEND, health inequalities and access to opportunity. Our actions will target the communities who need us most, helping to level the playing field and improve the life chances of every child.

What affect will the Policy/Service have on community relations? (may also need to consider activity which may be perceived as benefiting one group at the expense of another)

The plan will ensure that the service continues to work with the specific specified groups identified through the Protected Characteristics and does not differentiate between different groups.

Please list any **actions and targets** that need to be taken as a consequence of this assessment on the action plan below and ensure that they are added into your service plan for monitoring purposes – see page 12 of the Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance.

5. Summary of findings and Equality Analysis Action Plan

If the analysis is done at the right time, i.e. early before decisions are made, changes should be built in before the policy or change is signed off. This will remove the need for remedial actions. Where this is achieved, the only action required will be to monitor the impact of the policy/service/change on communities or groups according to their protected characteristic - See page 11 of the Equality Screening and Analysis guidance

Title of analysis: Best Start Plan 2026 - 2029
Directorate and service area: CYPS
Lead Manager: Helen Sweaton - Service Director, Commissioning, Quality and Performance
Summary of findings:
The Best Start Plan places a strong emphasis on equality and inclusivity, ensuring that its aims and outcomes serve diverse communities and groups, especially those most affected by systemic inequalities. The plan is committed to supporting more children to achieve a good level of development at age five years. 1. Primary Beneficiaries: ○ Children and Families: The strategy targets children not achieving a good level of development at age 5 (35.7%), their parents/ carers and communities and the people who work with them across the education, health, care and voluntary sectors. 2. Groups Identified by Protected Characteristics: ○ The plan acknowledges that some children are less likely to achieve a good level of development due to their characteristics such as males (43.6% not achieving) and those eligible for free school meals (52.4% not achieving) and males eligible for free school meals (61% not achieving). ○ Other protected characteristics, including disability, race, religion, and sexual orientation, are carefully considered to ensure fair access to services and opportunities.

Action/Target	State Protected Characteristics as listed below	Target date (MM/YY)
Cabinet paper approval	As Above	15 February 2026

*A = Age, D= Disability, S = Sex, GR Gender Reassignment, RE= Race/ Ethnicity, RoB= Religion or Belief, SO= Sexual Orientation, PM= Pregnancy/Maternity, CPM = Civil Partnership or Marriage. C= Carers, O= other groups

6. Governance, ownership and approval

Please state those that have approved the Equality Analysis. Approval should be obtained by the Director and approval sought from DLT and the relevant Cabinet Member.

Name	Job title	Date
Nicola Curley	Strategic Director, CYPS	04 February 2026
Cllr Victoria Cusworth	Lead Member, CYPS	

7. Publishing

The Equality Analysis will act as evidence that due regard to equality and diversity has been given.

If this Equality Analysis relates to a **Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision** a copy of the completed document should be attached as an appendix and published alongside the relevant report.

A copy should also be sent to equality@rotherham.gov.uk For record keeping purposes it will be kept on file and also published on the Council's Equality and Diversity Internet page.

Date Equality Analysis completed	03 February 2026
Report title and date	Best Start Plan
Date report sent for publication	
Date Equality Analysis sent to Performance, Intelligence and Improvement equality@rotherham.gov.uk	04 February 2026