



# Early Years Strategy 2022-2026

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# Foreword

Ready to learn, ready for school, ready for life.



**Wirral is a great place to grow up and the Early Years Strategy sets out from the earliest start of life how well growing up will be in Wirral. Setting out a focus from birth to beyond will secure foundations that will be long lasting through early childhood, adolescence and into adulthood.**

The Wirral Plan (2021-2026) has a vision 'to create equity for people and place and opportunities for all to secure the best possible future for our residents, communities and businesses', inclusive of 'working together for brighter futures for our children, young people and their families by breaking the cycle of poor outcomes for all regardless of their background'.

Our ambition for this strategy is that all children get the best possible start in life. This can only be achieved if we change the way we do business and provide the most effective support to children and their families so that they feel safe, have good health and achieve their full potential.

Evidence tells us that what happens during pregnancy and in the Early Years shapes children's physical health, their language and communication, and their emotional wellbeing.

We must bear that in mind with the most recent

disruption to early childhood services due to the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst babies were still being born and children were still developing in their earliest days, weeks, months their opportunities for critical learning and socialisation experiences were limited.

As such the indirect impact of COVID-19 on young children's development has been extensive and multifaceted and the full impact is yet to be known.

Therefore, we are committed to the delivery of high-quality Early Years services, and early intervention that is equally accessible to all through a continuum of support from conception through to age five. The strategy is based around our vision for babies and young children which is for them to be: resilient, independent, effective communicators, happy with good friendships and most importantly –

**Ready to Learn, Ready for School and Ready for Life.**

**Elizabeth Hartley**  
Interim Deputy Director Children's Services

# Introduction

Every baby and child living and growing up in Wirral deserves the best possible start in life.

**Wirral Council and their partners will focus on making Wirral great for children, young people and their families, driven by the voice of the child, young person and their families.**

We will build on a model that is integrated and responsive to needs to ensure children and young people are given the best possible opportunities to achieve their ambitions through a united approach across services within Wirral, such as health, early years, community and voluntary services and schools. We aim to 'Raise aspirations, celebrate achievement and improve attainment for all children, young people and families to reach their full potential' (Wirral Partnership Board Objective).

This strategy has been co-produced and is intended to be a guidance document for parents/carers, key stakeholders and all early years professionals working across health, family support, PVI settings, childminders, children's centres, nursery and primary schools on Wirral. In particular, professionals can use this document to reflect upon the effectiveness of service provision in supporting school readiness and to consider any development required.

Every baby and child living and growing up in Wirral deserves the best possible start in life and the best support that allows them to fulfil their potential. As

Professor Sir Michael Marmot stated: 'The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional – are laid in early childhood. What happens during these early years has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and well-being. ('The Marmot Review – 10 Years On')

Children develop quickly in their early years and a child's experiences between birth and age five has a major impact on their future life chances. We want all our children on Wirral to be happy, healthy and grow into confident, capable and resilient young adults. Our children starting school will all have different experiences, as will their families and carers.

How good and positive those experiences are by the time they start school will depend on a whole range of factors, like where they grow up, the family they grew up in, the opportunities they have to play and learn and the support they have in their own communities.

A lack of attachment and stressful experiences in the early years can impact negatively on physical and emotional development. There is capacity for healing through changing circumstances, taking nurturing approaches and supporting resilience through family support, childcare providers, schools, communities and services. Children feeling safe is also critical to support them into adulthood.



This strategy is for all Wirral children in their earliest years, with a keen focus on the impact on child development when living with family circumstances such as; child poverty, worklessness, Domestic Abuse, Mental Health and Parental Conflict, for example: the strategy sets out to empower families and their wider communities

to keep them and their children safe and well cared for; having the personal resources to cope in difficult situations; knowing where to go for help; and finding help from services that understand and respond to differences in personal circumstances. This strategy will be subject to an annual review by a multi-agency partnership group.

# Context: What do we know?

A child's experience during the early years is critical to their physical, cognitive and social and communication development.

**Research informs us how critical a baby's first 12 months of life are and thereafter first 1001 days, particularly in terms of brain development. Positive attachment and interactions from 'every touch, movement and emotion in a young child's life translates into an explosion of electrical and chemical activity in the brain' (UNICEF: 2001).**

A child's early brain development can be stifled by such factors as inadequate nutrition, poor health and limited access to clean water. Furthermore, research outlines the correlation of early childhood development, during this period, with later success in school and the character of adolescence and adulthood.

Furthermore, a child's experience during the early years is critical to their physical, cognitive and social and communication development. During this development phase the foundations are put in place for the rest of that child's life and is a once in a lifetime opportunity to give that child the 'best start in life'.

Both the Allen report (2011) and the Marmot review (2010) recognised the importance of giving every child the optimum conditions and how investing in this period of a child's life influences their school readiness, educational attainment, economic participation and long term health.

Furthermore the ability to communicate thoughts,

feelings, desires and to be understood is a fundamental human right and need, yet for nearly 30% of children entering our schools on Wirral this basic ability is not as well developed as it might be.

Some of these children will have complex speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), a significant number will have needs which if identified and addressed promptly in the early years, can be expected to resolve. Between these groups are the children who have significant SLCN but whose needs can be appropriately met by a well-trained workforce in collaboration with specialist speech and language therapists.

Wirral strives for 100% of our children achieving their full speech and language potential and the Wirral Communication and Language Pathway (2021) will help to contribute towards all children's communication skills.

The Wirral Communication and Language Pathway has been co-produced for all those with an interest in or working with children under 5 years. The pathway details a child's journey from pre-birth, 0-1 years, 1-2 years and 2-3 years with advice and guidance.

The triad within the C+L Pathway demonstrates the pathway to support a child's early language development.

## Legislation, policy and research in a national context

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Children Act 1989</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect 1989 United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child</li> <li>• Welfare of children is paramount</li> </ul>	<p>SEND code of practice: 0-25 2014</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duties of LAs, health bodies, schools and colleges to provide for those with special educational needs under part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Children Act 2004</b></li> <li>• <b>Placed responsibility on safeguarding partners to plan together to safeguard children.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduced Early Help</li> <li>• Introduced Common Assessment Framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Childcare Act 2016</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extended the entitlement to 30 hours free childcare over 38 weeks of the year for three- and four-year-olds in families where all parents are working.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Healthy Child Programme: Pregnancy and the First 5 Years of Life 2009</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A universal preventative service, providing families with a programme of screening, immunisation, health and development reviews, supplemented by advice around health, wellbeing and parenting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better Births: Improving outcomes of maternity services in England 2016</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Five Year Forward View for maternity</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Equalities Act 2010 (this superseded the Disability Discrimination Act 1995)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society.</li> <li>• Replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act.</li> <li>• Introduced protected characteristics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Workforce Strategy 2017</li> <li>• 'Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential' 2017</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The government's plans to help employers attract, retain and develop early years staff.</li> <li>• The government's national plan to support children and young people to reach their full potential.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Child Poverty Act (2010)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Places a duty on LAs to prepare a 'local child poverty needs assessment' setting out the needs of children living in poverty in the area.</li> <li>• LAs have a duty to prepare a child poverty strategy to "set out the measures they propose to take to reduce and mitigate the effects of, child poverty".</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best Start in Life and Beyond 2018</li> <li>• School Nurseries Capital Fund 2018</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving public health outcomes for children, young people and families. Guidance for 'Healthy Child Programme for 0-19 years.</li> <li>• To create more school-based nursery places for disadvantaged children.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Children and Families Act 2014.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduced a 26-week time limit for courts to decide whether or not a child should be taken into care.</li> <li>• Education, Health and Care Plan to support children and their families from birth to 25 years.</li> <li>• All state-funded schools to provide free school lunches for all pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2.</li> <li>• Amendments made to the law to protect children in cars from the dangers of second-hand smoke.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Development Fund Programme 2019</li> <li>• Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage 2021</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide high-quality, evidence-based professional development support for Early Years Practitioners in pre-Reception settings.</li> <li>• Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five</li> </ul>

Local context

149

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER (CLA) 0-5YRS

Higher than neighbours and compared to national levels  
(May 2022)



48

CLAs UNDER 2YRS  
A significant rise within the total number of CLAs  
(May 2022)

31-34%

LOWER OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN LIVING WITH DOMESTIC ABUSE

Compared to their peers at Key Stage 4

35%

WIRRAL'S POPULATION LIVING IN POVERTY

Deprivation increased between 2015-2019

1 IN 3

CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY  
within Bidston and St. James, Birkenhead and Tranmere, Seacombe and Rock Ferry



LACK OF SUFFICIENT PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT INCOME

Key driver for child and family poverty



WIRRAL'S UPTAKE OF EYFE

**HIGHER**

THAN NATIONAL & STATISTICAL NEIGHBOURS  
(Spring 2022)



83% 2 YEAR OLDS    91% 3 YEAR OLDS

87% 3&4 YEAR OLDS

2019

GLD ACHIEVEMENT BELOW NATIONAL AVERAGE

National: 71.5%  
Wirral: 69.3%

EARLY C&L DEVELOPMENT **REDUCED**

FOR MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN (FSM)



67.3%

FREE SCHOOL MEALS 2018

67.2%

FREE SCHOOL MEALS 2019

CLA - Children Looked After  
EYFE - Early Years Funding Entitlement  
GLD - Good Level of Development  
C&L - Communication & Language  
FSM - Free School Meals



## Local context

Percentage children achieving at least the expected level of development in C&L across statistical neighbours

Area	2017	2018	2019
Wirral	78.7%	79.9%	77.9%
North West	79.3%	79.8%	73.8%
Stat Neighbours	80.3%	80.1%	79.6%
England	82.1%	82.4%	82.2%

Percentage children achieving GLD

	2018	2019
Children Looked After	61.5%	57.7%
Children with SEND	19.6%	18.4%

The latest figures are from the EYFSP end of academic year data 2019 due to the disruption of assessments and education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. There was no EYFSP data 2020/2021.

Percentage children achieving GLD and at least expected level of development in C&L across the Liverpool City Region

Good Level of Development (GLD)				Communication & Language (C&L)			
Area	2017	2018	2019	Area	2017	2018	2019
England	70.7%	71.5%	71.8%	England	82.1%	82.4%	82.2%
Wirral	69.4%	70.5%	69.3%	Wirral	78.7%	79.9%	77.9%
Liverpool	62.1%	66.1%	64.9%	Liverpool	77.4%	79.1%	78.3%
Knowsley	67.1%	68.3%	67.8%	Knowsley	80.1%	79.1%	79.7%
Sefton	70.3%	70.8%	68.8%	Sefton	81.4%	81.0%	78.8%
Halton	60.9%	64.5%	66.1%	Halton	76.4%	78.9%	79.1%
St Helens	67.1%	69%	70.2%	St Helens	79.4%	79.2%	79.7%

Child Health Profile (March 2021)

	Wirral	England
Smoking at time of baby delivery	12.5%	10.4%
Low Birth rate	2.7%	2.9%
Sustained breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks	36%	48%
Obesity (at reception age)	9.5%	9.9%
Tooth decay	No data	23.4%
A&E attendances 0-4 years	893 (rate per 1k)	655 (rate per 1k)

Data source: [chimat@phe.gov.uk](mailto:chimat@phe.gov.uk) | [fingertips@phe.org.uk](mailto:fingertips@phe.org.uk)

# The impact of COVID-19 on children under five, their parents and the early years system

Many young children had their usual access to playgrounds, outdoor space, toddler groups, and children centres prohibited.

**There are concerns that the impact of the pandemic will have a significant adverse effect on babies, born and unborn, who are experiencing this crisis at a particularly critical stage in their development, and will also have an impact on the wellbeing and development of 2-4 year olds.**

Families who were already experiencing multiple adversities may have found that problems intensified during COVID-19 and were unable to access the same level of support from family and friends and social networks in their community. At the same time, they may have been unable to access the same level of professional support through community, health, and specialist services.

For other families, the extraordinary circumstances that arose from the pandemic created new hardships and vulnerabilities which may not be readily identified by professionals and may take some time to emerge. Many young children also had their usual access to playgrounds, outdoor space, toddler groups, and children centres prohibited which supports key developments of physical, communication and social skills.

This may have negatively impacted on the wellbeing and development of children, particularly those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. In these instances they may have been living in overcrowded accommodation, had limited garden access, or limited digital resources to facilitate play and therefore learning at home.

Ultimately leading to concerns that the pandemic will have further embedded the existing development gap between disadvantaged children and their peers when they start school.

As a result, an increased range of educational, socioeconomic and health inequalities needs could unfold throughout the lifespan of this Strategy, which calls for all to 'build back better', through this co-produced document.



### **What can we do to address COVID-19 impact and 'Build Back Better'?**

Positive early interactions in the first 1001 days can be further reinforced with high quality early education that is shown to support development from pre-birth to pre-school. This provision must be organised and delivered collaboratively to address access and health inequalities that impact families in their communities.

Young children from less affluent backgrounds targeted to engage with school-ready activities, to halt the inflated gap developed through 'lockdowns' between toddlers from higher and lower income families by 24 months. Proactive outreach and support for parents with children eligible to take up of the disadvantaged 2-year-old offer, which has seen a 20% dip during COVID-19.

Sustainability support and planning with early years providers, who continue to find their feet as small businesses', having been impacted by both reduced staffing and financial circumstances.

Nurture confidence in parents that are understandably fearful of their baby or young child starting or taking up a place at an early education setting.

Review how the learning and development Progress Check at Age 2 can resume across all EYFS provision, which was disapplied on a temporary basis.

Integrate the Progress Check at age 2 with the Healthy Child 2-year developmental review to gain a 'holistic' view of each individual child's journey to be 'ready for school'.

Mobilise the whole early years system to identify and intervene at the earliest opportunity where Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) may need additional resource or funding. Be engaging, influential and aspirational in this Strategies aims and objectives.

# Our early years vision

Wirral is committed to working in partnership to achieve the very best start for its youngest children.

## What do we mean by 'early years'?

For the purposes of this strategy, early years is from pre-birth to five years old. This broad definition of early years is in recognition of the importance of a healthy pregnancy, good parenting and high-quality education and childcare in influencing outcomes.

Wirral is committed to working in partnership to achieve the very best start for its youngest children in delivering the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework for children between birth and age five with fidelity and consistency. The framework is mandatory for all early years providers in England.

The EYFS sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. The Wirral Early Years strategy will use the EYFS guiding principles as our key priorities:

- Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.
- Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.
- Children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.
- Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

# Definition of school readiness

Wirral Council has adapted UNICEF's description of School Readiness consisting of three interconnecting strands:

## Child ready

Focusing on children's learning and development

## Family ready

Focusing on parental and caregiver attitudes and involvement in their children's early learning and development

## School/early years provision/services ready

Focusing on the school/early years environment along with practices that foster and support a smooth transition into primary school and promote the learning of all children. Considered together and connected appropriately, these strands maximise each child's likelihood of success as they progress through their time in school to be ready for life.

### Child Ready

All children develop well and are effective learners whatever their needs may be.

### Family Ready

Parents have high expectations for their children and the skills to help them develop and grow.

### School Ready

All children have access to good and outstanding learning environments.



# School readiness and self-regulation

Self-regulation skills are vital to leading fulfilling and successful lives.

**A prominent aspect of school readiness for Wirral's children is self-regulation, which is consistently linked with successful learning, including pre-reading skills, early mathematics and problem solving.**

Research suggests that improving the self-regulation skills in the early years is likely to have a lasting impact on later learning at school and also have a positive impact on wider outcomes such as behaviour and persistence. There are indications that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to begin nursery or reception with weaker self-regulation than their peers.

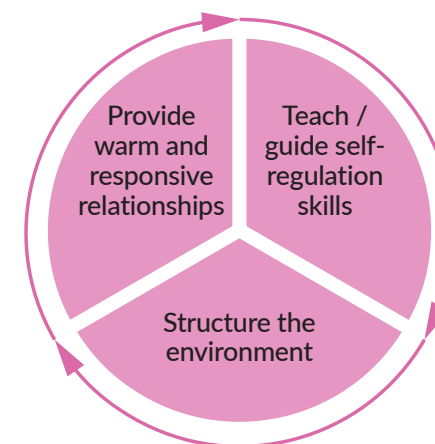
#### Self-regulation is:

- Controlling feelings and behaviours
- Self-soothing/bouncing back from upset
- Being able to curb impulsive behaviours
- Being able to concentrate on a task
- Being able to ignore distractions
- Behaving in ways that are pro-social (like getting along with others)
- Planning
- Thinking before acting
- Delaying gratification
- Persisting in the face of difficulty

These skills are vital to leading fulfilling and successful lives.

#### Strategies to help children develop self-regulatory skills

- **Positive Relationships** – Provide a warm and responsive relationship where children feel respected, comforted and supported in times of stress and confident that they are cared for at all times
- **Enabling Environments** – Create an environment that makes self-regulation manageable, structured in a predictable way that is physically and emotionally safe for children to explore and take risks without unnecessary stressors.
- **Learning and Development** – Teach self-regulation skills through modelling, suggesting strategies, providing frequent opportunities to practice and scaffolding to support children to use self-regulation skills.



# Local level definition

The five key aspects of school readiness identified through consultation are:



What is important for parents is that these skills are emerging as they enter Reception classes and secure as they transition into Year 1.



# Consultation and co-production

Wirral will approach its development of children and services and go forward with them into adulthood.

**Consultation was carried out with children, parents, carers, practitioners, partners, and professionals, 'MY CHILD CAN... Be ready to learn, ready for school, ready for life' was co-produced.**

100 parents of children aged 0-5 across Wirral were consulted to inform this strategy. Sharing their views and priorities for their children as they grow up in Wirral.

Five questions were created around the four key

elements of the Early Years Strategy: My Child Can, My parent will, My setting/school will, and My community will.

In-line with the results of the consultations and acknowledging key skills and attributes nurtured in the earliest years Wirral will approach its development of children and services and go forward with them into adulthood.





## Parent consultation aspirations

### What parents told us through consultation - we set out the Key Objectives and Priorities:

#### I can support my child by:

- Providing a healthy diet, opportunities for exercise and a good sleep routine
- Keeping them safe – teaching them how to keep themselves safe too
- Reading and sharing books with them
- Listening to them – letting them have a voice. Allowing them to express themselves and be who they want to be
- Love them – lots of cuddles, praise and care

#### My child can support themselves to achieve:

- Be confident, kind and helpful to others
- Be able to communicate effectively – have good language skills
- Be brave to explore new things
- Enjoy healthy food
- Have a healthy lifestyle – lots of family time

#### Hopes and dreams for my child:

- To be healthy, happy and safe
- To have a good education leading to a great job that they enjoy
- Good social networks – family, friends and community
- Be a kind, confident person who is loving, independent and funny.

#### School/nursery can support my child:

- More childcare places, at affordable rates, and flexible hours
- Communicate better with parents – keep me informed
- Help parents how to find out about available nursery places and costs
- Respect children's culture
- Better mental health support for children

#### The community can support my child:

- Better access to leisure facilities like swimming and clean parks
- Provide better public transport
- Lots more groups for parents and 0-5s – open access and free
- Support for families with disabled children or parent
- Advertise 'what's on' better so we don't miss out on events or activities



# Key objectives and key tasks



## Key objectives:

- An early intervention and preventative approach that is inclusive in supporting children, young people and families to build resilience and take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.
- Children get the best start in life, so they are able to learn and develop resilience, capability, confidence and self-assurance through positive relationships.
- Raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development in building community capacity to promote health and wellbeing using local assets.

## Key tasks:

### Breaking the Cycle

- Challenge barriers by having a one system coordinated approach across services throughout the earliest years and school.

### Continuous Improvement

- Co-produce with families and communities effective universal and targeted services throughout localities with aspirations for improved outcomes.
- Provide challenge, training and support for parents and professionals in early years.

### Creating a Culture of Inclusion

- Empower parents and carers of children with SEND to challenge the workforce to be a champion of their child's voice.
- Ensure all provision is ready for the child and at each transition point each child's needs are identified

### Creating a Culture of Inclusion our people to make it happen

- Invest in the early years practitioners of tomorrow
- Better collaboration between the statutory services and the voluntary/charity sector.

# Our Priorities

We aspire for all children on Wirral to develop these key skills in their earliest years that will secure foundations for their journey through school and into adulthood;

- Resilience
- Communication & Language
- Positive sense of Self
- Manage Emotions
- Collaborate
- Independence

Linking our priorities to the aspects within the Early Years Foundation Stage; Unique Child, Positive Relationships, Enabling Environments and Learning and Development it will give a consistent approach and understanding of the requirements of us all in supporting children to be 'Ready to Learn, Ready for School and Ready for Life'.



## Our priorities

### A unique child

**Each child is unique and their experiences in the very earliest years from conception make a significant difference to their lifelong health, wellbeing and life chances.**

These experiences and environment influence neurological and biological development. Children

develop in different ways and rates of development vary from child to child and from time to time. Giving children the best start in life to ensure they are able to learn and develop skills so they are ready for each step on their journey from birth, to school and beyond.

**How we will do this is:** By parents, partners and communities understanding how each child learns and develops in complex and diverse ways; professionals will access quality training opportunities to maintain a highly skilled workforce; parents can access services to support their understanding of their child's development; Early interventions and support, such as Portage, will be available in a timely manner for those children who need it or have SEND.

My child can...	My parent will...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build resilience and manage stress</li> <li>• Develop effective speech and language</li> <li>• Develop a positive sense of self and others</li> <li>• Manage emotions and collaborate with others</li> <li>• Make independent choices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help me to keep trying, even when I'm not sure I can.</li> <li>• Play and talk with me and listen to me</li> <li>• Help build my confidence, let me know we are all valued and have a place in the world.</li> <li>• Be warm and responsive, showing me that emotions are allowed and how I can manage them.</li> <li>• Give me choices, so I get to know what I like and don't like.</li> </ul>
My setting / school will...	My community will..
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide play and self-initiated activities so I can choose, innovate, take responsibility, face challenge and think critically</li> <li>• Create an environment that makes me want to talk and chat to me about what I see.</li> <li>• Plan the environment to meet my needs and interests and celebrate all my achievements.</li> <li>• Help me to develop my skills to self-regulate in order to modify my behaviour and interact with others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be nurturing, but also show me ways to deal with life when it doesn't go right.</li> <li>• Respect and celebrate diversity giving me a sense of place and belonging</li> <li>• Provide opportunities and services to address my unique needs.</li> <li>• Provide safe places for me and my friends to play together.</li> <li>• Provide lots of experiences for my family to enjoy.</li> </ul>

## Our priorities

# Positive relationships

**How we will do this is:** By parents, partners and communities understanding how relationships are key to building a child's sense of belonging and self-esteem through; access to better information for new parents, such as First 1001 Days, parents/carers along the Parenting Journey; train practitioners and professionals on strategies to develop speech, language and communication and trauma informed practices; effective universal/targeted/specialist services to identify and offer support; promoting inclusion and challenging barriers; sharing information securely and sensitively and listen, respect and value everyone's views.

**Children growing up in healthy stable and nurturing family environments are more likely to be better prepared for school and life, and to experience better outcomes.**

The key protective factor to enable infants to reach their potential is the quality of the interactions they receive. Mothers, fathers and carers are key factors as they are the experts about their child/children's lives and

parenting is the key factor influencing children's social and emotional development. They are the child's greatest educator and role model.

Parents, carers and practitioners need to support children towards responsible self-care and regulation. Resilient families are the key to optimising children's development.

My child can...	My parent will...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build close attachments with adults who are important to me.</li> <li>• Develop friendships and engage with peers.</li> <li>• Take turns, share and work together in a group.</li> <li>• Communicate feelings and wishes with others.</li> <li>• Interact with others with care, empathy and respect.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurture my emotional resilience.</li> <li>• Parent me positively in a healthy stable environment.</li> <li>• Get more support for me if needed.</li> <li>• Chat, read and play with me.</li> <li>• Develop my social circles where I can actively play, learn and develop.</li> </ul>
My setting / school will...	My community will..
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen and respect my parent/carers voice.</li> <li>• Meet my individual needs through a keyworker system.</li> <li>• Get specialist support if I need it.</li> <li>• Be a champion of my personal, social and emotional development.</li> <li>• Create an environment that includes co-regulation strategies to support the development of self-regulatory skills.</li> <li>• Develop my communication skills so I can build positive relationships.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-produce a vision of a positive community for me to grow up in.</li> <li>• Work together and support each other to help me develop.</li> <li>• Deliver a partnership model for early help and prevention.</li> <li>• Have safe places where I can play, learn and make friends.</li> <li>• Value the voice of the child in all service developments.</li> </ul>

## Our priorities

# Enabling environments

**How we will do this is:** By parents, partners and communities having access to opportunities of continued professional development, training and support: reach out to and support parents of eligible children of the disadvantaged 2-year-old offer, encourage good take up of 3 + 4 year free entitlements, nurture high quality early educational settings, prepare disadvantaged children for the start of their school journey, empower parents to challenge accessibility barriers for children with SEND and celebrate co-production of Wirral's Children Centres services which complement the community early help offer.

**The definition of 'a child's lived experience' is what a child sees, hears, thinks and experiences on a daily basis that impacts on their personal development and welfare whether that be physically or emotionally.**

Quality and consistency in the provision of all early years services is vital so that every child makes good progress and no child gets left behind. Evidence shows

that higher quality provision which offer children security, comfort, choice, engagement and opportunity has greater developmental benefits, particularly for the most disadvantaged children, leading to better outcomes. Children thrive within inclusive environments that support their individual and diverse motivations, interests and needs.

My child can...	My parent will...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be confident and experience a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of success.</li> <li>• Have a sense of belonging, safety, and security.</li> <li>• Play, explore, and learn through independent choices.</li> <li>• Have a voice or way of communicating that will be heard and understood.</li> <li>• Move freely and coordinate space, through exploration and risk-taking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the importance of the home learning environment.</li> <li>• Provide consistent routine and boundaries for me.</li> <li>• Talk with me about the world around us.</li> <li>• Access advice and guidance to provide a safe environment at home.</li> <li>• Seek out time and support if required to help me transition particularly when leaving me.</li> </ul>
My setting / school will...	My community will..
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an environment that does not rush, providing time and space to focus on what interests me in a consistent and predictable day.</li> <li>• Provide balanced time between indoor and outdoor, loud, and quiet times, bright and dark areas, warm and cool, with activities adapted to be accessible and inclusive.</li> <li>• Provide a language rich environment.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities to develop core strength, stability balance, spatial awareness, coordination, and agility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote spaces that are rich and varied, well managed and protect me from harm and abuse.</li> <li>• Nurture an environment that is warm, welcoming, and ensuring a sense of community.</li> <li>• Use language my family and I understand.</li> <li>• Involve me and my family in setting community values.</li> <li>• Bring all professionals together where I need support to access services to help me and my family have an improved daily lived experience.</li> </ul>

## Our priorities

# Learning and development

**How we will do this is:** By parents, partners and communities engaging through our Children Centres and community groups, with a strong focus on early intervention, prevention and tackling inequalities. Home Learning Environment (HLE) supports vulnerable children and engages families in learning. That every child, no matter their circumstance, can make progress, given the right support at the right time in order to reach their full potential. That parental conflict is resolved in a timely manner. Capturing the child's voice through the Supporting Families, Enhancing Futures (SFEF) model. That inclusion and opportunity celebrate diversity.

**All children develop at their own pace and all children are unique. Children learn best when they feel safe and valued.** Emotional self-regulation provides the foundation for learning and development. Effective learning must be

meaningful to a child so that they are able to use what they have learned and apply it to new situations. They need learning and development opportunities which are planned around their needs and interests and reviewed regularly.

My child can...	My parent will...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have self-belief in reaching my full potential.</li> <li>• Be motivated to make sense of the world around me, through curiosity and inquisitive thinking/learning.</li> <li>• Create logical and critical thinking through play and exploration.</li> <li>• Self-regulate emotions and behaviours, embracing learning and grow into a self-regulating young person/adult.</li> <li>• Communicate and vocalise my needs and interests to adults.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be my first and most important educator, from birth to school readiness, nurturing attachment, and healthy development.</li> <li>• Understand the importance of home learning and take every opportunity to Chat, Play, Read, and Sing with me.</li> <li>• Expose me to various interactions of personal, social, emotional, and physical activity.</li> <li>• Show warmth and sensitivity, using appropriate discipline without harshness.</li> <li>• Access services and early educational childcare settings to enrich my learning experiences and develop good attendance behaviours.</li> </ul>
My setting / school will...	My community will..
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide varied and rich developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that are motivating, fun and enjoyable.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for self-initiated learning and exploratory play, balanced with sustained shared thinking to stretch my abilities.</li> <li>• Provide keyworkers with a high level of practitioner knowledge, skills, and expertise to track, monitor and improve my outcomes from their starting points.</li> <li>• Respond to differences in learning styles and can adapt play and learning opportunities, adopting a graduated approach when required.</li> <li>• Hear my voice and involve me and my parents/carers in my next steps.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure I have access to high quality and engaging childcare, that is rated Good or Better.</li> <li>• Have available clear pathways from universal to specialist support that is jargon free and easy to navigate through.</li> <li>• Be innovative in bringing together Children Centres, Voluntary / Charitable Organisations, 0-19 Health &amp; Wellbeing services and statutory agencies, in delivery of interventions to support my developmental progress and transitions.</li> <li>• Work together to identify my merging needs and engage with specialists on my identified needs for targeted/ specialist support.</li> <li>• 'Start the Conversation' - help me shape my community, help me live a healthy and happy life.</li> </ul>

# The parenting journey

We can lay a foundation of health and wellbeing whose benefits last a lifetime – and carry into the next generation.

**Wirral's Early Years partnerships have a vision that every baby has loving and nurturing relationships in a society that values emotional wellbeing and development in the First 1001 days, from pregnancy, as the critical foundation for a healthy and fulfilling life.**

There is clear, compelling evidence that this is a significant and influential phase in development. This is an age of opportunity. What happens during this period lays the foundation for every child's future health, wellbeing, learning and earnings potential.

It sets the groundwork for children's developing

emotional wellbeing, resilience and adaptability; the competencies they need to thrive. During this period we can lay a foundation of health and wellbeing whose benefits last a lifetime – and carry into the next generation.

Both the First 1001 Days Pathway (koalanw.co.uk/1001-days-programme) and Wirral Parenting Journey (wirral.gov.uk/early-years-and-childcare/parenting-journey) sets out an integrated approach from antenatal to school readiness and signposts parents to the partners and services that are available to give support along the way.





# Working in partnership

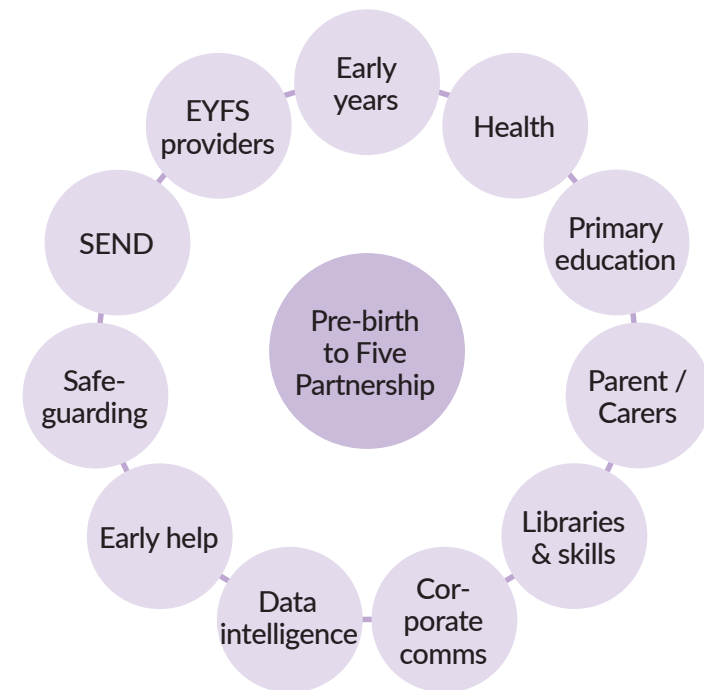
**Wirral Council and partners have a clear vision for integrated services and a 'whole system' approach to be able to move towards more aspirational outcomes for children and families.**

The Strategy for Early Years is an opportunity to move towards a new vision for early years which will integrate universal early years' services with more targeted and specialist support for vulnerable groups/geographic areas. For instance, aligning the aims of Better Birth, Healthy Child Programme and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) will support the delivery of a shared outcomes framework with shared objectives for commissioning, resources, delivery models and workforce.

As a result, effective partnerships and integrated working will lead to co-production, transparency and strengthened communication across Wirral's early years system.

Key partners:

- Parents, carers and families
- Maternity services
- Public Health
- Health Visiting
- Voluntary, Charitable and Social Enterprise (VCSE) services
- Local authority services
- Early Years providers
- Schools
- Faith sector



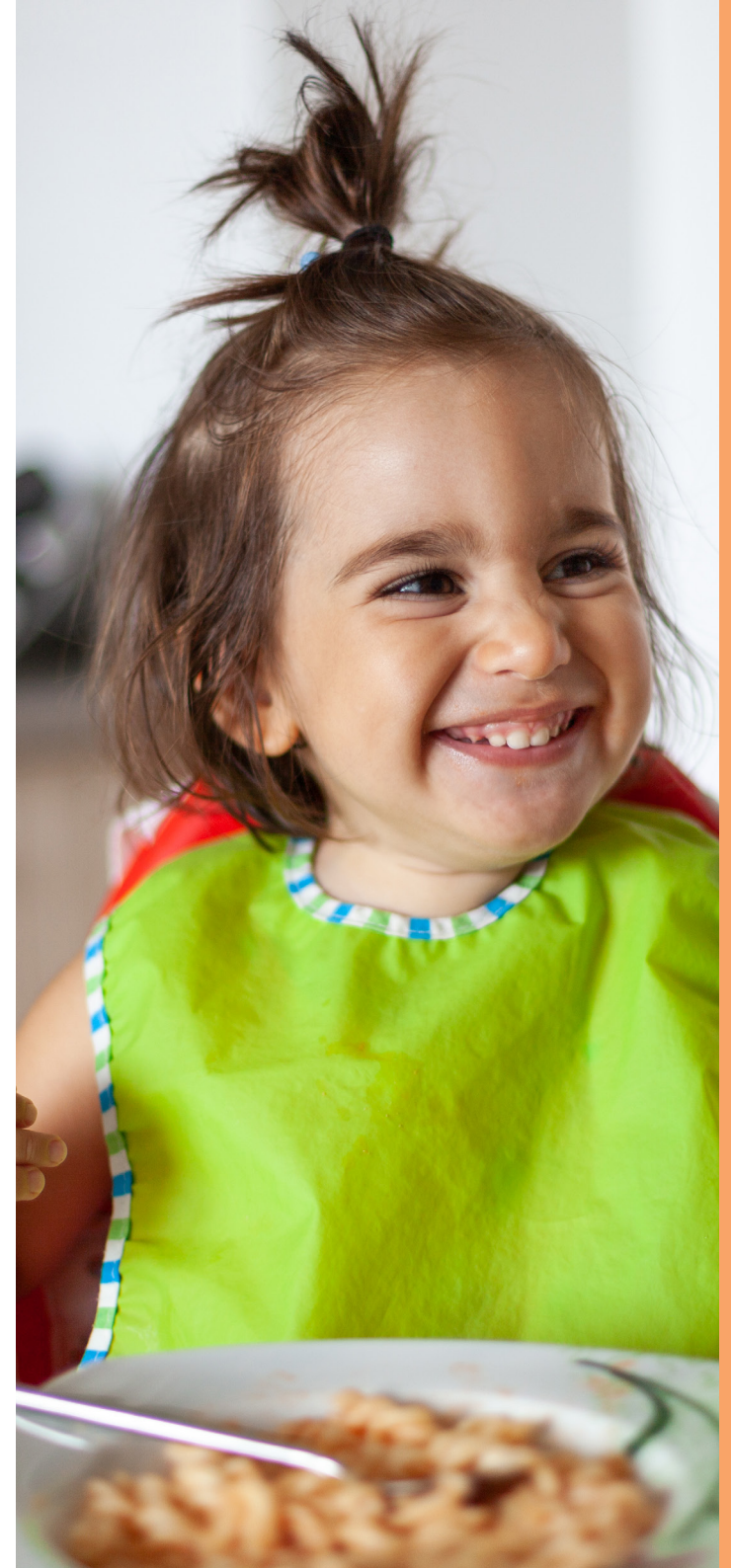
# Workforce development

To deliver this Strategy there will be a need for a continual programme of training and development across all early year's professionals.

**A committed and supportive early years partnership will collectively strive for the development of a well-qualified and highly motivated workforce with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and experience to deliver better outcomes for all Wirral's children from birth to age five.**

To deliver this Strategy it is identified there will be a need for a continual programme of training and development across all early year's professionals. That there will be a need to commission experts, in specific fields of child development to train and upskill the workforce. That collaboratively regular auditing of and observing skills will help identify gaps.

Acknowledging the benefits in utilising skill sets from across the borough and pooling of resource to meet demand and grow capacity. Through working together across the various partnerships creating a workforce that delivers consistent messages will give parents a better understanding of child development, that will enable them to help their child thrive.



## All women experience safe and positive pregnancies and childbirth that results in the birth and care of healthy babies...

	...are resilient, capable and coping	...make independent choices	Develop a positive sense of self	Manage emotions	Collaborate with others	Develop effective speech and language
<b>Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achieve developmental milestones between 12 months to 5 years</li> <li>Narrow the attainment gap at the end of Foundation Stage between those on FSM and those not.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All children from 0-5 years are safe and healthy and access health reviews</li> <li>All children aged 2-4 years take up their free entitlements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All women experience safe and positive pregnancies and childbirth that results in the birth and care of healthy babies</li> <li>Achieve attainment milestones at 5yrs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To improve percentage of all children achieving a Good Level of Development particularly in personal, social and emotional.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All early years providers rated 'good' or 'outstanding'</li> <li>Integrated systems to support children with SEND</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents and their children have a love of books.</li> <li>All children achieve the ELG for Communication &amp; Language</li> </ul>
<b>Poulation indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of A&amp;E attendances of 0-4 yrs.</li> <li>Number of hospital admissions (0-5 yrs) caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries rate per 10,000.</li> <li>Number of infant deaths</li> <li>Number of low birth weight full term babies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of mothers initiating breastfeeding</li> <li>Number of mothers sustaining breastfeeding 6-8 weeks</li> <li>Number of women accessing peri-natal mental health support</li> <li>Percentage of mothers smoking at time of delivery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of CLA 0-5 yrs</li> <li>Number identified with emerging SEND needs</li> <li>Percentage 3-4 year olds eligible take up their free entitlement.</li> <li>Percentage 2 year olds eligible take up their free entitlements</li> <li>Percentage of 4-5 year olds classified as overweight or obese.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of infants who receive a 6-8 wk developmental check</li> <li>Percentage of babies who receive a 9-12 month health visitor review pre 12 months.</li> <li>Percentage of 2-2½ year olds who receive a health visitor review</li> <li>Percentage of 2½ year integrated progress checks completed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of early years providers rated 'good' or 'outstanding'</li> <li>Percentage of children who achieve ELGs in all three Prime Areas.</li> <li>Percentage of children attaining the ELG in Communication &amp; Language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of children eligible for free school meals achieving a Good Level of Development compared to those not eligible</li> <li>Percentage of children who are looked after and/or SEND achieving a GLD</li> <li>Percentage of children with good level of attendance at their early years establishment</li> </ul>
<b>Performance &amp; quality of service measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement in health and pre-natal support services</li> <li>Engagement in post-natal services</li> <li>Maternity Voices/ Customer journey feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High level engagement in Children Centre activities and services</li> <li>High level engagement in voluntary &amp; community activities and services</li> <li>Good collaborations across organisations</li> <li>Effective intervention programmes being delivered.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs)</li> <li>Aspirational targets set for learning and development attainment</li> <li>Analysis of non take up of eligible EYFE places.</li> <li>Family Information Parent Satisfaction surveys.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High level take up of 'First 1001 Days' activity</li> <li>High number of children being supported through the Graduated Approach</li> <li>Case studies and impact reporting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Majority of Wirral early years providers delivering high quality childcare</li> <li>High level of quality Ofsted ratings of settings</li> <li>Sufficiency assessment demonstrates strong market of childcare</li> <li>Workforce Development Framework.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High proportion of eligible families take up EYPP and DAF</li> <li>Robust monitoring of progress of our vulnerable children</li> <li>Auditing and monitoring of funding places and attendance.</li> </ul>

# What will success look like?

‘Investing in early childhood development is a cost-effective way to boost shared prosperity, promote inclusive economic growth, expand equal opportunity, and end extreme poverty’

*UNICEF 2018 ‘Early Childhood Education*





# Acknowledgments

## With sincere thanks to:

- Elizabeth Hartley - Interim Director of Children's Services
- Carol Fenlon Head of Service – Early Childhood Service
- Wirral Early Childhood Services team managers and staff
- 0-19 Community Health Trust
- Foundation Years Trust
- Koala Northwest
- Wirral Creative and Digital team
- All the Wirral Primary Schools who facilitated consultations with children, took part in school ready surveys and joined working groups

And finally, a special thank you to all parents and children in Wirral who helped to shape this early years strategy by agreeing to be part of the consultation.



# Contact information

## Family Information Service

[fis@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:fis@wirral.gov.uk)

## Early Years Quality Improvement & Training Team / Business Team

0152 666 3980

[fis@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:fis@wirral.gov.uk)

## Early Years SEND team and Early Years Portage Team

[eysend@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:eysend@wirral.gov.uk)

## Children's Centres

### Birkenhead locality

2 Brasseley Street, CH41 8DA

Ionic St, Rock Ferry, CH42 2BL

### Wallasey locality

St Paul's Road, CH44 7AN

### South and West locality

Gratrix Road. Ch62 7BW

## Health Visiting Team

Birkenhead, Wallasey, South & West:

0151 514 0219

[wchc.nhs.uk/services/wirral-0-19-health-and-wellbeing-service](http://wchc.nhs.uk/services/wirral-0-19-health-and-wellbeing-service)

## Local Offer

[local.offer.wirral.org](http://local.offer.wirral.org)

Providing information for children and young people with SEND

## Hungry Little Minds

[hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk](http://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk) Simple fun activities for kids, from new born to five

## Tiny Happy People

[bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people](http://bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people) Tiny Happy People is to help parents develop their child's communication skills

## Foundation Years Trust

[foundationyearstrust.org.uk](http://foundationyearstrust.org.uk)

FYT support parents and carers of children 0-5 in their vital role as a child's first and most important educator.

## Community Midwives

[with.nhs.uk/our-locations/wirral-women-and-childrens-hospital/maternity-services/labour-care/community/community-midwives](http://with.nhs.uk/our-locations/wirral-women-and-childrens-hospital/maternity-services/labour-care/community/community-midwives)

Community midwives liaise and work closely with the hospital based midwives and obstetricians, local GPs, Health Visitors, Social Workers, Physiotherapists and other allied professionals to try to ensure support for families to meet their needs.

## Koala Northwest

[koalanw.co.uk](http://koalanw.co.uk)

Delivering a diverse range of services for the benefit of families

# Further information

**What to expect in the Early Years  
Foundation Stage: a guide for parents**  
[bit.ly/3DIOa7Z](https://bit.ly/3DIOa7Z)

**Development Matters 2020**  
[bit.ly/3dqXTVW](https://bit.ly/3dqXTVW)

**EYFS Statutory Framework**  
[bit.ly/3f8rKma](https://bit.ly/3f8rKma)

**Birth to 5 Matters**  
[birthto5matters.org.uk](https://birthto5matters.org.uk)

**Healthy Child Programme**  
[bit.ly/3xGKTSQ](https://bit.ly/3xGKTSQ)

**The Marmot Review – 10 years on**  
[bit.ly/3BBOZg6](https://bit.ly/3BBOZg6)

**The Allen Report 2011**  
[bit.ly/3BXHNMR](https://bit.ly/3BXHNMR)

**UNICEF 2015**  
[uni.cf/3BX37lp](https://uni.cf/3BX37lp)

**UNICEF 2018 - Early Childhood  
Development in the UNICEF Strategic  
Plan 2018-2021**  
[unicef.org/media/48126/file/UNICEF\\_  
Strategic\\_Plan\\_2018-2021-ENG.pdf](https://unicef.org/media/48126/file/UNICEF_Strategic_Plan_2018-2021-ENG.pdf)