

# Bristol's Belonging and Thriving Strategy

Our partnership strategy for children and young people for 2025 – 2030



We will work together so that all children and young people in Bristol feel they **belong, can achieve and thrive**, and are supported to be ambitious, safe and joyful.



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# Working together for Bristol's children and young people

**Every child and young person in Bristol should feel they belong. We want every child to be part of their family, school, and community, and to have the chance to grow, learn, achieve and thrive, no matter who they are or where they come from.**

Bristol can be the best place to grow up for everyone. To do this we have to overcome deep inequalities which persist and mean the most vulnerable children – those living in poverty, from marginalised communities or with additional needs – achieve the lowest outcomes.

So, our vision is a city where all children and young people in Bristol, but the most vulnerable above all, feel they belong and can achieve and thrive.

We want our city to be a city where the most vulnerable are supported to be ambitious, safe, and joyful.

This strategy explains how we will make our vision real. Bristol is full of energy, creativity, committed partners and strong communities that care deeply about the most vulnerable children and young people. Many organisations and services across the city already work together to provide support, opportunities, and connection. This strategy brings that work together, helping partners coordinate, share learning, and focus efforts where they are needed most. It is about building on our city's strengths while making sure every child has a fair chance to succeed.

**Our strategy is made up of three main parts:**

**1 Our priorities** – We have four main outcomes that will guide our partnership working as a city and three focuses for how we're going to make progress.

**2 Our plans** – While there are lots of ways partners are working together to make a positive difference, we have focused on some key programmes that will help us on our priorities.


**3 Our partnership** – We have made commitments to the ways we want all partners to work together moving forward.



# Bristol – a city of possibility for children and young people

Bristol is a young and diverse city. Our mix of cultures and experience is one of Bristol's biggest strengths...

Over **1 in 5**  
Bristol residents  
are aged  
**0-19**



The city is home to over 180 nationalities, 90 main languages and 45 religions



Over a third of Bristol's children and young people are from ethnic minority groups


For many children and young people, Bristol is a place of belonging and provides an opportunity to achieve and thrive. We know, however, that this is not the case for all children and young people. For instance...

**35.4%**  
of children and young people live in poverty (after housing costs) and nearly 16,000 experienced food insecurity



The rate of first-time entrants to the youth justice system in Bristol in 2024 was 158.7 per 100,000 population. The gap between Bristol and England rates has narrowed significantly since 2014 marking the city average as statistically similar to the national average (138.3 per 100,000) for the first time in 2024.

We know that children in poverty do least well at primary and secondary age and that South and East Bristol are amongst the worst places in the country for educational outcomes for young people by the age of 21



While the rate of children achieving a Good Level of Development in their early years is above the national average, the rate for children from deprived parts of Bristol is much lower

Hospital admissions of children and young people for mental health conditions, and as a result of self-harm are both high and well above the England average. Bristol's 2024 0-17yrs

in-patient admission rate for mental health conditions was 131 per 100,000 children, compared with the England average of 80 per 100,000 children



But we've already seen how working together can make a positive difference in the lives of these children and young people, and the communities they live and play in...

68.7%

of children had a Good Level of Development which is higher than the national average



We bucked the national trend with a reduction in the percentage of reception children who were overweight



We've seen an increase in attendance across all education phases up to 91.9% and are getting closer to the national average



The average Attainment 8 score has increased by 1.6 points for Key Stage 4 across the last academic year and we are above the national average for the first time in over a decade



We've seen a reduction in the rate of repeat referrals to children's social care. The rate of 19% is well below the England average of 22%

19%  
Bristol

22%  
England

The rate of children who have a Child Protection plan and the number of children entering care has steadily reduced, and our rate of children in long-term stable care is now better than the national average.



# The strategy: How we've developed it and how we'll deliver

Key partners - including the council, health organisations, the police, schools, trusts and the voluntary and community sector - have worked together on this strategy to build on the positive progress we have already made in reducing, inequality, improving outcomes and to putting children, young people and families at the heart of everything we do.

## How will the strategy be developed?

For each of the four priorities, we have described the main plans we think will make the biggest difference. All these plans rely on different partners and communities working together, with lots of the activity being delivered by groups outside of the Keeping Children Safe Board. Our main partnerships include:

<b>Thriving in early years</b> Bristol's Early Help Board Bristol Health and Wellbeing Board	<b>Families thriving in communities</b> Keeping Children Safe Board Keeping Communities Safe Board Bristol's Early Help Board	<b>Thriving and achieving through inclusive education</b> Excellence in Schools Group. SEND and Alternative Provision Board	<b>Thriving into the future</b> Youth and Play Alliance Bristol Youth Justice Board
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## How we'll measure progress

As a partnership, we will look at data and hear from children and young people to consider whether we are making progress on our four priorities and improving on our shared ways of working. We plan to do this four times a year through the KCS Board. We will find ways of communicating this progress to a wider audience so all partners and communities can be involved.





J K L M N

S T U V W X Y Z

# A summary of our priorities, plans and partnership

## Our Vision

We will work together so that all children and young people in Bristol feel they belong, can achieve and thrive, and are supported to be ambitious, safe and joyful..

## Our priorities and plans

<b>Thriving in early years</b> – Parents are supported to provide their children with the best start in life.	<b>Families thrive in their communities</b> – Families who need it are helped early and empowered in their communities.	<b>Thriving and achieving through inclusive education</b> – Partners will work to break the link between deprivation and attainment outcomes. Children are given support to meet their aspirations in an inclusive setting.	<b>Thriving into the future</b> – Children and young people feel safe, and are supported with the skills to thrive into becoming an adult in the digital era.
We will deliver this through our local Best Start Plan which will focus on improving education, health and social outcomes for 0 – 4s.	We will deliver this through improving our early help offer and working together to provide safety and stability for children and young people facing extra vulnerabilities.	We will deliver this through a whole education partnership with schools, trusts and partners to close the gap for children in poverty and improve inclusion across all stages of education.	We will deliver this through improving access to youth work, tackle exploitation and provide positive employment and skills opportunities for young people at risk.

## In everything we do, we are focused on

Tackling inequality, deprivation and disadvantage.	Strengthening our preventative approach through early help.	Putting health at the heart of everything we do.
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## Our plan to build a stronger partnership is based on

Putting the voice of children, young people and families at the heart of everything we do.	Developing a culturally competent and trauma informed children and young people's workforce.	Being more effective at sharing data and information across the partnership.
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# Our Priorities and Plans

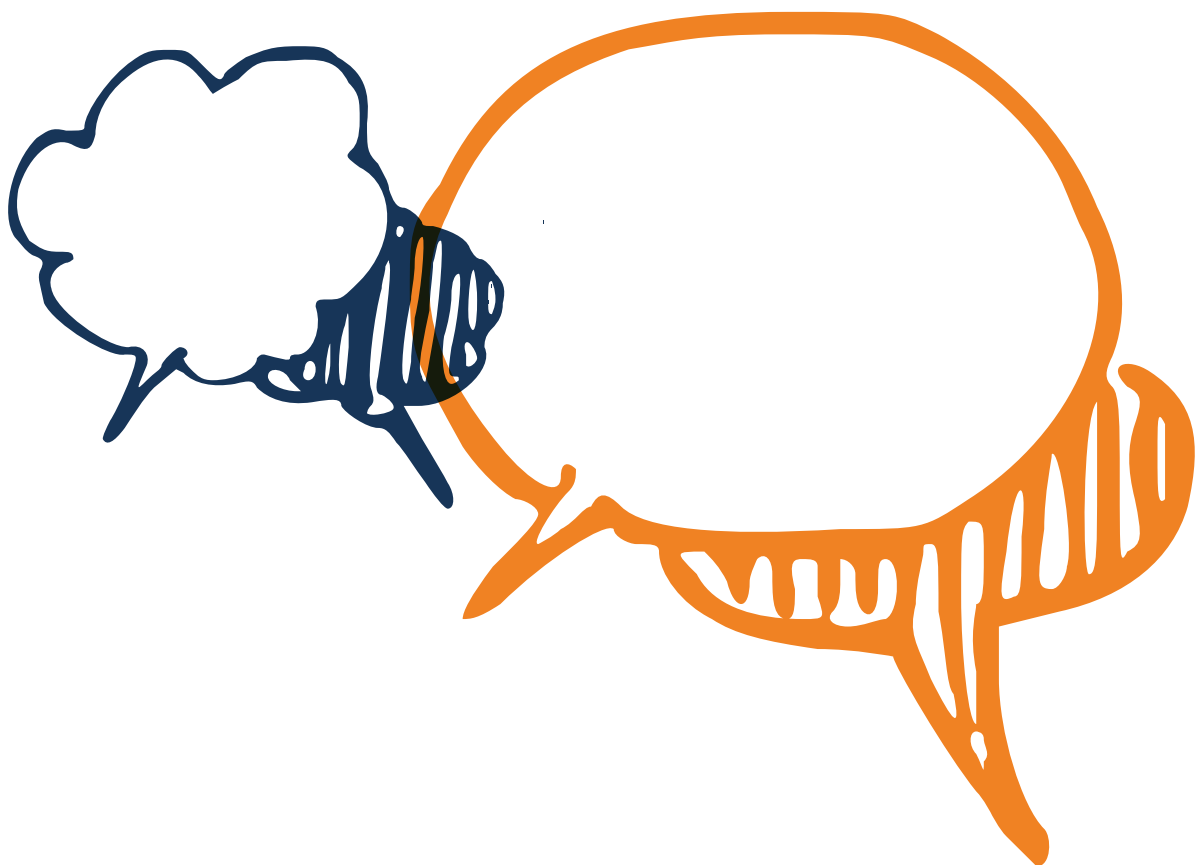
**Our strategy is based on partners working together to achieve four main priorities for children, young people and families. These are:**

- Thriving in early years
- Families thrive in their communities
- Thriving and achieving through inclusive education
- Thriving into the future

For each priority, we have said which big programmes or projects will help us make progress. These don't capture everything partners are doing but gives us focus for making sure we are pulling together in the right direction.

**Throughout all these priorities, and in everything we do, we have been driven by three important principles:**

- 1 Tackling inequality, deprivation and disadvantage
- 2 Strengthening our preventative approach through early help
- 3 Putting health at the heart of everything we do



1

# Thriving in early years



# Priority 1: Thriving in early years

## Why is this a priority?

The first few years of a child's life are very important for their health, happiness, and future. This time can also be hard for parents and carers. In Bristol, we want every child to get the best start in life and be ready to learn. Children need to learn to talk, play, make friends, manage their feelings, and enjoy learning. The first 1,000 days of life are especially important. Giving parents and babies the right support at the right time helps children grow strong and healthy.

Families need help from lots of people and services during these early years. Support should be easy to find, connected, and clear. Parents may need help with their own health and, as well as their baby's health.

## Our Plans

As a partnership, we will make progress on this priority through a new local Best Start Plan. This will bring together three core pieces of partnership work:

- Working together to **improve the access to good quality early years provision**, and support the recruitment and retention of the early years workforce.
- Providing community-based and online support for families through **Best Start Family Hubs**.
- Working with the Health and Wellbeing Board and communities to tackle **perinatal and infant health inequalities** and support the objectives of the **child health priority in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy**.

## How we'll measure success:

Our ultimate aim is that parents are supported to provide their children with the best start in life. We will measure progress through the following shared outcomes:

- At least 77.4% of children have achieved a Good Level of Development up to age 5, and at least 58.9% of children eligible for Free School Meals have achieved a Good Level of Development up to age 5 (by end of academic year 2027/28).
- That we exceed the national target for the percentage of eligible disadvantaged 2-year-olds and universal 3 and 4-year-old take up of the Free Early Years Entitlement by 2030.
- The proportion of infants receiving their 6-8 week health visiting review by 8 weeks of age will have reached 90%.
- The proportion of Year 6 children who are overweight or very overweight will have fallen to 34% by 2025/26.





2

Families thriving in  
their communities



# Priority 2: Families thriving in their communities

## Why is this a priority?

Every child and young person should be able to thrive in a supportive and stable home. We know that children and young people have the best chance to do this when their families and communities are thriving. There are lots of reasons that make this difficult for some families, so we must play our role in providing local and early support which keeps children and young people thriving within their homes and communities.

With a national focus on working together to keep children and young people within their family networks and providing more effective safeguarding, there is a real opportunity to build on the great people and places we have in our communities to help children, young people and their families access empowering support and opportunities to grow.

## Our Plans

As a partnership, we will make progress on this priority through the following programmes of work:

- Launching our Early Help strategy, working with partners and communities to develop a clear and accessible **Early Help Offer** and building on our **Best Start family Hubs**.
- Supporting the delivery of the **Families First programme** which is transforming the way partners work together to provide support as early as possible to keep more children and young people within their families and communities.

- We will continue to work with partners to deliver our **Corporate Parenting Strategy** to ensure that care experienced children and young people are given better access to stability, safety and opportunity
- Working together to deliver our **Harm Outside the Home** and developing our multi-agency safeguarding team approach.
- We will support work alongside **schools and trusts to engage well with their communities so that the most vulnerable are supported to attend and achieve.**
- We will proactively work with the Strategic Mayoral Authority to support the delivery of the West of England Child Poverty Action Plan

## How we'll measure success:

Our ultimate aim is that families who need it are helped early and empowered in their communities. We will measure progress through the following shared outcomes:

- We will meet new national guidance for the number of families who are supported positively through Family Help and work to go beyond the national average by 2030.
- Reduce the percentage of repeat referrals into children's social work to 18% by 2027 and look to reduce this further by 2030.
- We will have brought the number of children in care and children on a child protection plan down to our statistical neighbours
- Improve attendance at secondary level and close the gap in outcomes for the most vulnerable.

# 3

Thriving and achieving  
through inclusive  
education



# Priority 3: Thriving and achieving through inclusive education



## Why is this a priority?

Every child and young person should be able to thrive in a supportive educational environment. We want every child in Bristol to do well in school and go on to achieve their goals. Their education should support all children to aspire and succeed regardless of their background. In Bristol, some children face unfair challenges because of poverty, ethnicity, or Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Schools are at the heart of support for children and families. Relationships are very important, and schools often work with families for many years. Children spend a lot of time at school, so classrooms should feel welcoming and inclusive, providing a broad and exciting learning offer for children. As well as the curriculum, schools also provide help with things like parenting, health, safeguarding, and mental health support. Parents and children can get help from people they know and trust, who can guide them to the right services.

## Our Plans

As a partnership, we will make progress on this priority through two key programmes of work:

- Working with partners across the education partnership and with communities to deliver **Bristol Future**. The programme will focus on providing support to break the link between low educational outcomes and poverty.
- Working together to improve the health, education and social outcomes for children and young people with SEND through our **SEND and Inclusion Strategy**.

## How we'll measure success:

Our aim is to break the link between deprivation and educational outcomes, and that outcomes for children and young people facing other forms of inequality are supported to achieve. We will measure progress through the following shared outcomes:

- Increase overall Bristol school attendance to 95% by 2027/28, with a focus on improving rates for pupils eligible for Free School Meals, receiving SEN support or with an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) or children in care.
- Bring secondary school suspension rates down to the national average by 2025/26 and below it by 2030. Our focus will be on reducing suspension rates falling disproportionately among black Caribbean, mixed white & black Caribbean and Gypsy, Roma & Traveller pupils.
- Improve overall attainment rates at Key Stage 2 (Expected Reading, Writing and Maths) for pupils eligible for Free School Meals, receiving SEN support or with an EHCP or children in care.
- Improve KS4 (average Attainment 8 Score) for pupils eligible for Free School Meals, receiving SEN support or with an EHCP or children in care.



4

Thriving into the future

# Priority 4 Thriving into the future

## Why is this a priority?

Bristol is full of opportunity for young people as they grow into adulthood, but we know the opportunity is not always accessible for all. Whether it is childhood poverty, loneliness and isolation, the additional risk of harm outside the home, or a lack of access to high quality skills and learning, there are significant barriers to some of our young people thriving into the future.

As partners, we play a key role in supporting young people to feel safe, confident and in accessing the skills they need to thrive in a largely digital future. There are some great opportunities to connect our young people to the region's high growth jobs, but an ongoing duty to make skills and lifelong learning accessible to all.

## Our Plans

As a partnership, we will make progress on this priority through the following programmes of work:

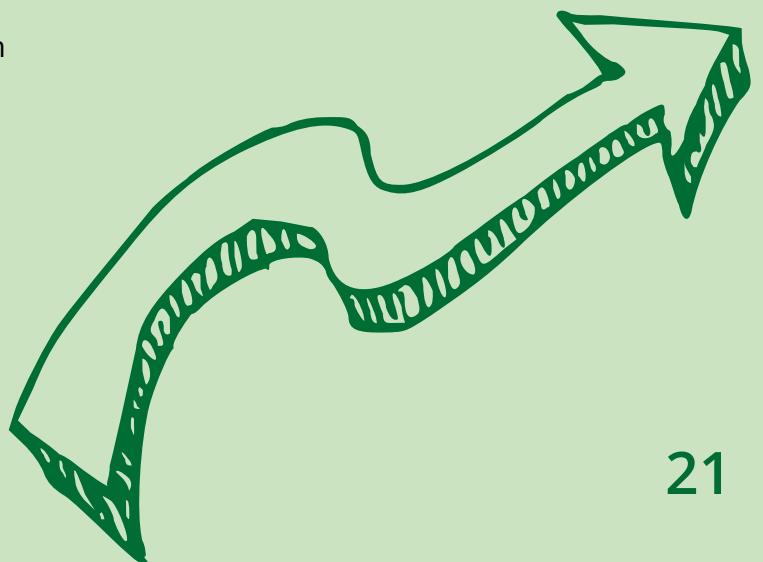
- We will work **with the Strategic Authority** to ensure that all young people are able to progress into further learning, high quality training or employment. In particular that those who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) are offered a high-quality training or employment opportunity through our **Youth Guarantee**.
- We will support the youth and play sector to deliver high quality and accessible youth work. As part of this, we will ensure that the 224 Youth Zone is a success, **deliver our young futures hubs**, and deliver positive opportunities to draw young people away from serious youth violence.

- We will deliver our partnership plan for improving outcomes for young people involved in the **youth justice system**.
- We will deliver the **Health and Wellbeing Strategy** priority concerning child and adolescent mental health, and deliver support to ensure health is not a barrier to employment and learning.

### How we'll measure success:

Our ultimate aim is that children and young people feel safe and are supported with the skills to thrive as they grow up into a digital future. We will measure progress through the following shared outcomes:

- Reduce the percentage of young people of academic age who are NEET to below 5% by 2030, and a reduction in 18 – 25-year-olds with an Education, Care and Health Plan who are NEET.
- We will measure young people's feelings of safety and will see improvements in confidence and safety among young people over time.
- Continue to reduce the number of first-time entrants into the Youth Justice system so it falls below the national average.



# Our Partnership

Reaching our vision of children and young people belonging and thriving will require us to improve **how we work together** and not just **what we are doing**. This was highlighted in a recent [independent review of serious youth violence](#) incidents in the city, which called on partners to 'refocus from constant activity' to developing leadership which supports 'truly collaborative behaviours...'

In other words, our ways of working are just as important as the things we work on.

While this feedback referred to serious youth violence particularly, the lessons learned from the review could so easily apply to how we work in partnership on all our priorities.

Moving forward will require us to be consistent, honest and more collaborative in our approach.

The review also highlighted the number of 'expert, highly skilled and knowledgeable' people there are across the children and young people's workforce. We want to build on this by providing the leadership required to make meaningful improvement.

To do this, we have agreed three ways of working to improve across the partnership:

- Putting the voice of children, young people and families at the heart of everything we do.
- Developing a culturally competent and trauma informed children and young people's workforce.
- Being more effective at sharing data and information across the partnership.



## Putting the voice of children, young people and families at the heart of everything we do

There are lots of great examples of organisations working more closely with children, young people and families when it comes to making decisions about themselves, their communities and the city. But we know that there is more that we can do to consistently listen to people's lived experience and factor them in when delivering our work.

**To make this a reality**, we take on board the recommendation of the independent review to develop a 'youth-focused assertive outreach approach' to listening to children, young people and families. This means persistently being in contact with those communities, building trusting relationships and elevating youth voice. We will develop a youth participation and voice strategy to outline our approach in the next year.

## Developing a culturally competent and trauma informed children and young people's workforce

The independent review has reminded us of how important it is to understand the additional barriers that some children, young people and families face because of structural racism or trauma. There is no one size fits all approach to support people, but there is more we can do to

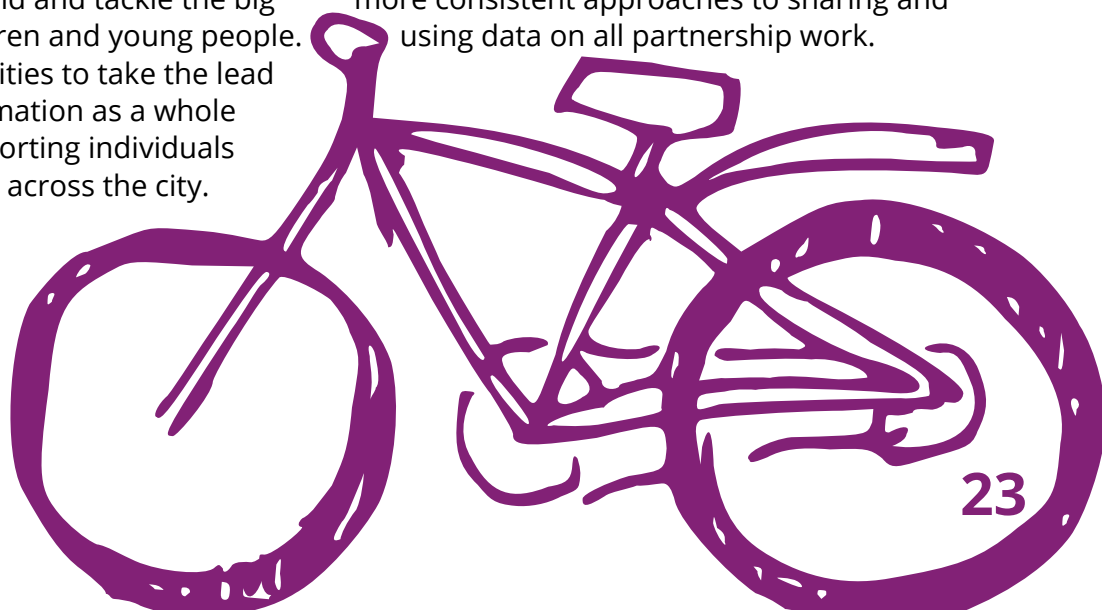
make sure our workforce is culturally competent and aware of trauma informed practise.

**To make this a reality**, we will consider cultural competency and trauma when developing a workforce training strategy for the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership.

## Being more effective at sharing data and information across the partnership

The review also highlighted the opportunity for partners to use evidence – both from sharing data but also from understanding people's lived experience – to understand and tackle the big challenges that face children and young people. There are great opportunities to take the lead in sharing data and information as a whole partnership, both in supporting individuals and measuring outcomes across the city.

**To make this a reality**, we will use the learning from our emerging approach to multi-agency data sharing on harm outside the home to create more consistent approaches to sharing and using data on all partnership work.





# More information on our partnership strategies

We hope reading the Belonging and Thriving Strategy gives you a better understanding of the big plans that are in place to make life better for children, young people and families in Bristol.

There are lots of smaller steps that we need to take to make progress on each priority. That is why we have included some information about other city-wide strategies that include more detail on how we'll move forward.

## Existing strategies

### **Bristol Employment, Skills and Lifelong Learning Plan**

#### **Bristol City Council**

A plan for how the council will work with partners and communities to deliver on eight priorities, including achieving better career outcomes for young people and families being left behind.

### **Bristol SEND and Inclusion Strategy**

#### **Bristol SEND local area partnership**

Sets out how our partnership will make things better for children and young people (CYP) with SEND over the next four years.

### **Bristol Youth and Play Alliance Strategy**

#### **Bristol Youth and Play Alliance**

Sets out the top priority work to ensure high quality youth provision is available across the city for all young people.

### **Corporate Parenting Strategy**

#### **Bristol Corporate Parenting Panel**

Children in care grow up in safe and stable homes, are supported as young people leaving care and go on to lead happy, healthy and fulfilling lives as adults.

### **Harm Outside the Home Strategy**

#### **Preventing Violence Board (part of KBSP)**

Sets out how everyone will be involved in early identification, information-sharing, and building resilience within wider communities to disrupt harm and promote long-term safety for children and young people.

## Strategies being developed in 2025/26

### **Best Start Plan**

#### **Bristol Early Help Board**

Will set out how partners will work together to improve the number of children who reach a Good Level of Development by age 5.

### **Bristol Future**

#### **Bristol Future programme**

Will set out how education partners will work together to break the link between deprivation and educational outcomes.

### **Bristol One City Health and Wellbeing Strategy**

#### **Bristol Health and Wellbeing Board**

Will set out how health, care and community partners will work together to reduce health inequalities and prevent health issues among children, young people and families.

### **Infant Feeding Action Plan**

#### **Bristol, North Somerset and South**

Gloucestershire (BNSSG) Integrated Care Board (ICB)  
Will set out how health partners will work together to improve access to feeding advice and support for families.

### **Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Strategy**

#### **BNSSG ICB**

Will set out how health partners will work together to provide earlier identification and support for parents and infants which lead to improved mental health outcomes.

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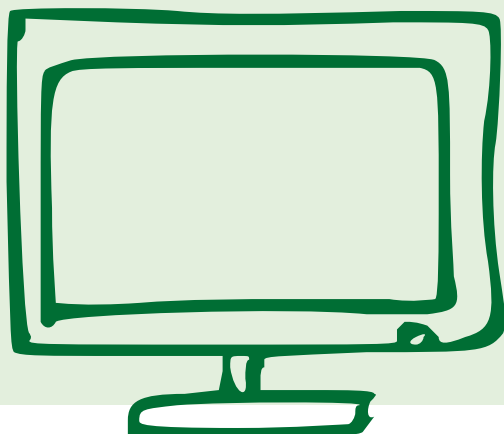
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### **Prevention and Early Help Strategy**

#### **Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership**

Will set out how different services come together to provide effective and timely support for children, young people and families when they need it.

### **Youth and Youth Participation Strategy**

#### **Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership**

Will set out how partners work together to improve the voice and representation of young people in decision making across the city.



