

Nottinghamshire Best Start Strategy

2025 to 2030



 BEST
START
IN LIFE

Foreword

We all share a responsibility to ensure that every child can thrive, regardless of their background or circumstances.

This refresh of the Nottinghamshire Best Start Strategy focuses on prevention, early intervention, and strong relationships. It puts parents and families at the heart of our efforts - because when parents are supported, children flourish.

When we act early and work together, we can make a difference. Developed with key partners from across the system, including families, this strategy reflects what we know about the building blocks for a healthy and fulfilling life. It recognises the challenges many families are facing and sets out a clear, collective commitment to act.

By investing in the earliest years, from pregnancy through to age 5, we can help every child reach their full potential. Let's make Nottinghamshire a place where every child is given the best possible start - because a good start shapes lifelong health, wellbeing and prosperity.



Councillor John Doddy,
Chair of the Nottinghamshire
Health and Wellbeing Board

Our Vision

Every child has the best start in life and parents, parents-to-be, babies, and young children have what they need to thrive.

Families, communities, and services join together to make Nottinghamshire a great place to be born and grow up.

Through this strategy we use the term parent. By parent we mean mums, dads, carers, step-parents, co-parents, grand-parents and all other type of parent.



Why is ‘best start’ a priority?

When we give children a great start, it helps them stay healthy and happy throughout their lives.

The circumstances we’re born into shape our future and influence lifelong health and happiness. Safe communities, warm homes, nutritious food, stable jobs, and financial security create the conditions for families to thrive. Strong relationships, a sense of belonging, and opportunities for learning and leisure are just as important.

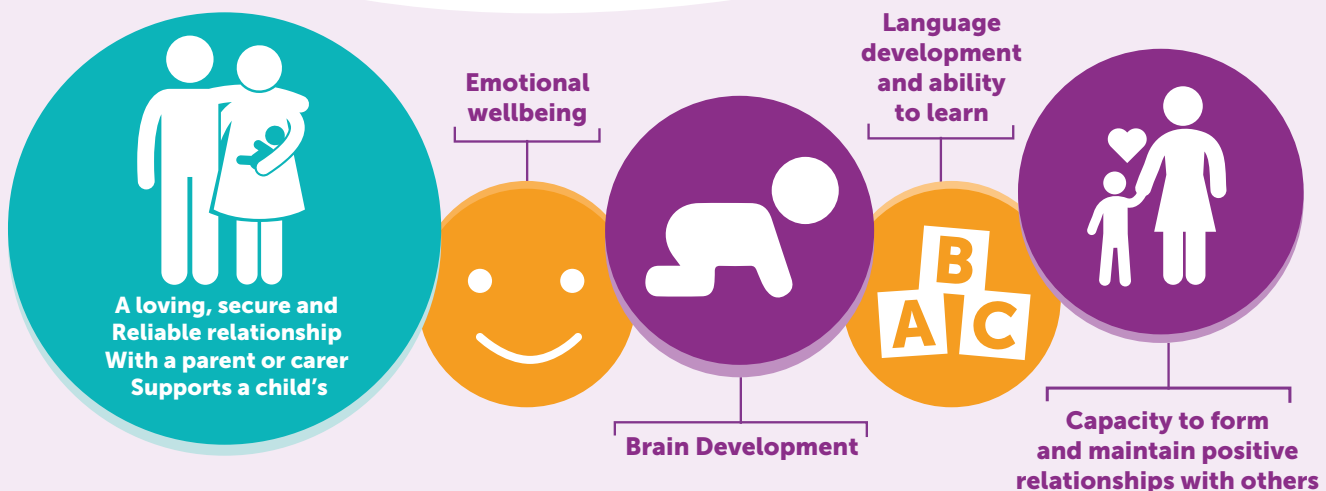
Right now, there are unfair differences (inequalities) in health and prosperity across Nottinghamshire. More children live in poverty than the national average. Children from poorer areas are less likely to reach a good level of development at ages 2 and 5. Not enough young people are in education, employment or training. Too many children and families aren’t reaching their full potential.

Creating the right conditions for children and families involves working with parents, communities and local services. We all have a part to play in building supportive environments where every child can thrive and that’s what this Best Start strategy aims to do.

Experiences in our early life affect how we relate to others, manage emotions, and succeed in school— shaping the opportunities we have later in life.

The love, care, and nurture given to a baby in the 1,001 days from the start of pregnancy to the age of 2 is crucial. Babies growing brains are shaped almost entirely by the interactions they have with their parents and carers – they need parents who are caring and responsive, giving them love, attention and opportunities to learn. These good early relationships build healthy brains, so children start school well prepared to make friends and learn. Families who are overwhelmed or under stress may find this harder.

Giving every child the best start in life



The 'next 1,000' days are vital too. Children from age 2 onwards are excited to explore and learn. They begin to recognise their feelings and build relationships with more people. A quality early years education - through pre-schools, nurseries, childminders and other settings – gives children a strong foundation for future success and can help level the playing field.

It's never too late - there are lots of opportunities to support those who didn't have all the building blocks in place, so they are set up for school and beyond. That's why this best start strategy focuses on the needs of parents, parents-to-be, babies, and young children from the start of pregnancy up to the age of 5. By working together to build strong foundations in pregnancy and across the early years, we can give every child the chance to grow, learn, and thrive - now and for the future.

How we treat young children shapes their lives – and ultimately our society. If we get the early years right, we pave the way for a lifetime of achievement. If we get them wrong, we miss a unique opportunity to shape a child's future.



Giving every child the best start in life

Nottinghamshire's Best Start Strategy will play a key role in delivering the Government's national commitment to improve early child development and reduce inequalities at a local level.

The national Best Start in Life strategy, published in July 2025, aims to ensure that a child's background doesn't determine their future success, so that all children develop well - learning to communicate, build relationships, manage their emotions, play and learn. More specifically, it aims to:

- enhance family services and early intervention through 'Best Start Family Hubs'
- provide affordable and accessible childcare
- deliver high quality early education.

The Nottinghamshire Best Start Strategy is well aligned to the national plan – sharing an ultimate ambition to ensure that every child has the care, education, and opportunities they need to thrive.



Where did we start?

Ten ambitions

Our first best start strategy launched in 2021. It introduced ten key ambitions that were identified from the evidence about what works and coproduced with partners in our local system. If these ten ambitions are achieved, children have the best chance of thriving:

- 1 Prospective parents are well prepared for parenthood
- 2 Mothers and babies have positive pregnancy outcomes
- 3 Babies and parents/carers have good early relationships
- 4 Parents/carers are engaged and participate in home learning from birth
- 5 Parents/carers experiencing emotional, mental health and wellbeing challenges are identified early and supported
- 6 Children and parents/carers have good health outcomes
- 7 Children and parents/carers are supported with early language, speech and communication
- 8 Children are ready for nursery and school and demonstrate a good level of overall development
- 9 Children have access to high quality early years provision
- 10 Parents/carers are financially resilient and can access secure employment

Everyone in our best start system remains committed to delivering these ambitions.



Our Best Start System

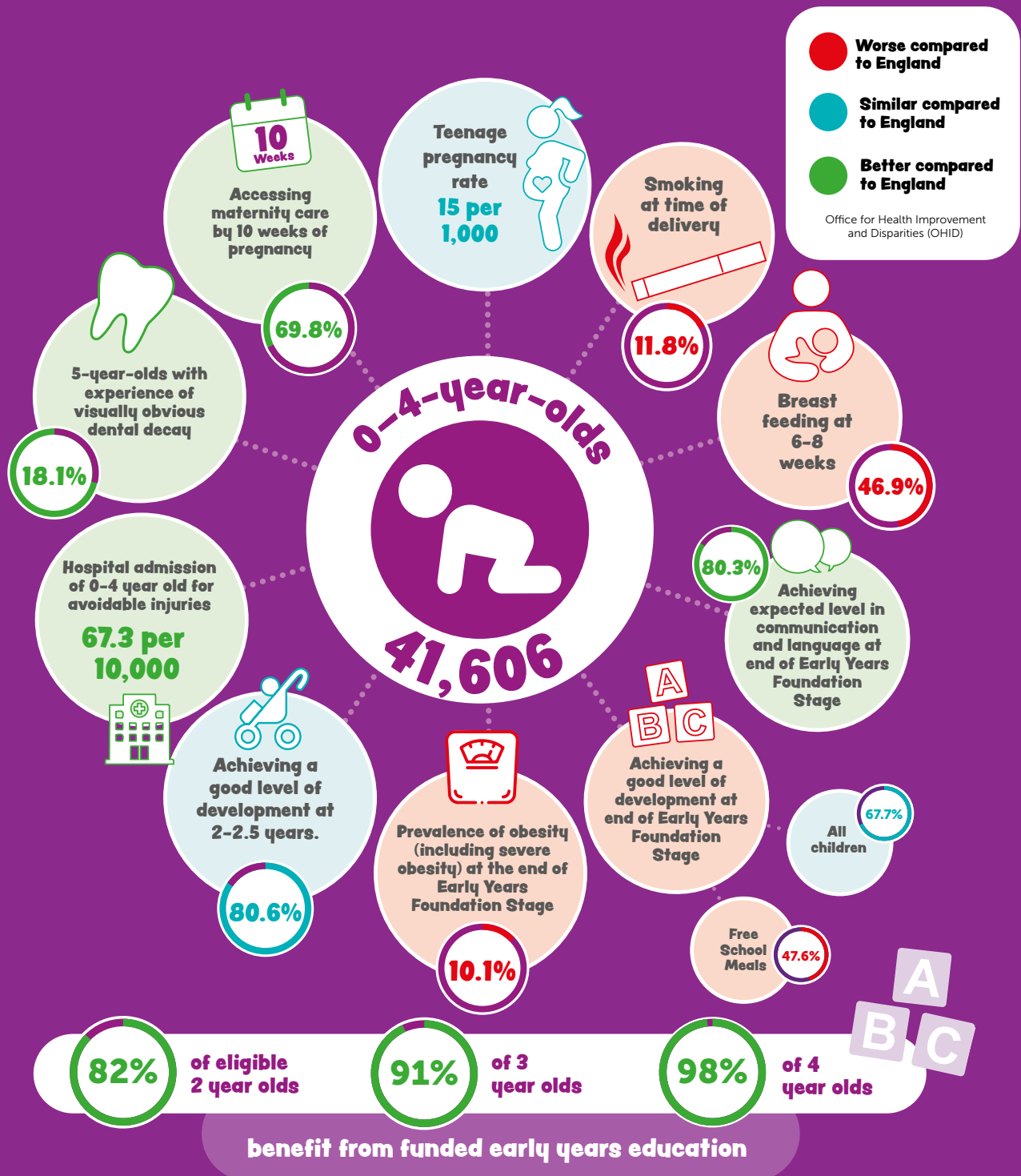
Our best start system is made up of parents, carers and all those who have a role in supporting families in Nottinghamshire, including voluntary and independent providers.



These people and services work together in Family Hub Networks across Nottinghamshire. Family Hub Networks join up the organisations and services working to support families in an area to provide a 'one-stop shop'. They cover support from pregnancy, through the child's early years, later childhood and into young adulthood.

Where are we now?

We are delighted to recognise the brilliant work of our best start system since our first strategy was launched, unfortunately we cannot list all the great work that's already happening for parents, parents-to-be, babies, and young children.



A refreshed joint strategic needs assessment on the first 1,001 days from the beginning of pregnancy to the age of 2 has informed the priorities of this strategy refresh. This looked at the needs of people in Nottinghamshire as well as the evidence about what works and made recommendations about what we should focus on. The JSNA can be accessed through this link.

[Best Start - 1001 days from conception to age 2 \(2025\) - Nottinghamshire Insight](#)

What have we heard?

Mothers, fathers, carers and key stakeholders have helped to shape this Best Start Strategy by identifying priority areas of focus and highlighting key themes.

Direct consultation with families took place between October and December 2024 and previous consultation and engagement findings from recent years linked to best start, early years and Family Hubs were reviewed. In 2024, dedicated workshops were held with the Best Start Partnership and members of the Nottinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Board.

From this work, several consistent priority areas were identified:

- Support for parents / carers emotional and mental health
- Parent and infant relationship support
- Positive pregnancy outcomes
- Being well prepared for parenthood
- Early home learning and child development

Key themes identified also included father inclusivity and the need to recognise the information and support fathers need. The importance of families being aware of and accessing services early, especially during pregnancy was emphasised. It was identified that the strategy should be inclusive, supporting the diverse range of families that live in Nottinghamshire and include a co-production approach that learns from families' experiences.



Priority 1:

Building blocks of health and wellbeing

Good health and wellbeing enable people to live happy, fulfilling lives. Every building block of health needs to be in place.

For some families in Nottinghamshire these building blocks are missing or weak. When families don't have what they need to thrive, it can lead to chronic stress or poor health and affects a baby or young child's start in life. Babies and children growing up in poverty are at more risk.



Working together, we will:

- Ensure the people and services who have contact with families know about the building blocks of health and understand the impact they have
- Support families to make positive changes to their health and wellbeing by making every contact count
- Ensure that families know about and can access the support they're entitled to
- Ensure a wide range of people and services who have contact with families understand the impact of giving every child the best start.

How will we know we have made a difference?

- People from across our best start system will have received relevant training. *Measures will include uptake of making every contact count 'healthy conversations' training and 1,001 days e-learning.*
- Families access the support and services they are entitled to. *Measures will include access to funded childcare, access to Family Hub Networks for support, uptake of the Healthy Start Programme.*

Priority 2: Parents mental health

When parents have good mental health and emotional wellbeing, their baby or young child is more likely to thrive.

Mental health can have a huge impact on how parents respond to the needs of their baby or young child. Those who experience poor mental health might need extra support to provide a nurturing environment.

Working together, we will:

- Develop a culture that recognises the importance of parents emotional health and wellbeing and the part this plays in healthy child development.
- Support parents to improve their mental health and wellbeing, with a focus on mild to moderate and emerging mental health needs.
- Support parents and parents-to-be to understand the changes in mental health and emotional wellbeing they might experience and equip them to recognise and respond to these.

How will we know we have made a difference?

- Parents access the mental health and emotional wellbeing information, support and services that they need.
Measures will include increased access to services, access to digital information and use of mental health assessment tools by professionals. Outcomes for those accessing interventions will be measured wherever appropriate.



Priority 3: Preparing to be parents and healthy beginnings

Becoming a parent is a big life change - one that begins even before pregnancy. By supporting parents' health and wellbeing, we help give babies the best possible start in life.

Pregnancy, birth, and the early years can be challenging for many parents. Confidence and parenting skills are shaped by childhood experiences, support from family and friends, and the circumstances we live in. By supporting parents through this journey, we can help children have the best start in life.

Working together, we will:

- Help parents to be ready for parenthood, especially families who are more vulnerable
- Support family's health and wellbeing before pregnancy and across the early years'
- Reduce avoidable and unfair differences in pregnancy outcomes
- Connect parents as early as possible with information, support, and services that will help them be the best parents they can

How will we know we have made a difference?

- Parents engage in support and services as early as possible. Services make a positive difference to those who access them. *Measures will include early access to maternity care, access to antenatal education offers, and engagement in wider services such as Family Hubs and Healthy Family Teams prior to birth. Outcomes for those accessing interventions will be measured wherever appropriate.*
- Health inequalities in the perinatal period will reduce *Measures will include key public health outcomes for maternity such as healthy weight, smoking, nutrition, infant mortality. Differences in outcomes by deprivation and vulnerable groups will be measured where appropriate.*



Priority 4: Building strong relationships

The relationships we build with those around us impact our happiness and our ability to handle life's challenges. That's why strong relationships are at the heart of our Best Start system:

- Babies need a loving, nurturing relationship to support healthy brain development.
- Parents need to feel confident they are raising their child in a supportive and caring environment
- Parents should have trusting relationships with the professionals who support them.
- Services and professionals must work closely together to provide seamless support.

Working together, we will:

- Promote and support bonding, attachment, and the early parent-infant relationship
- Support connections and relationships between parents
- Build stronger connections between the people and services that support families, joined up around Family Hub Networks
- Build trusting relationships between families and the people and services who support them

How will we know we have made a difference?

- More children meet expected levels of development in relation to social and emotional development
Measured via the Ages and Stages Questionnaire and the Early Years Foundation Stage
- More parents access information and services that support relationships. Services make a positive difference to those who access them.
Measures will include increased access to and uptake of parent-infant relationship interventions, relevant Family Hub support, parental conflict training, and to information and digital support. Outcomes for those accessing interventions will be measured wherever appropriate.
- A wide range of people and services that support families are actively involved in Family Hub Networks and the local Best Start system



Priority 5: Early experiences: chat, play, read and learn

From the moment they are born, babies learn through interactions with the world around them. Every smile, word, and playful moment builds connections in their growing brain.

Parents are a child's first and most important teacher. These early experiences are crucial – influencing language skills, social and emotional wellbeing and laying the foundations for lifelong learning,

Working together, we will:

- Promote and celebrate the importance of interaction and play from pregnancy, birth and across the early years
- Support parents to provide great learning environments at home and access great learning environments in our communities
- Support early speech, language and communication development from pregnancy, birth and across the early years

How will we know we have made a difference?

- More parents access services that support language and communication development services. Make a positive difference to those who access them.
Measures will include access to services that support early speech, language and communication services.
- More children achieve the expected level of development in relation to language and communication
Measured via the Ages and Stages Questionnaire and the Early Years Foundation Stage.



Five cross cutting themes



Co-production with families

We will put the everyday lived experience of families, and what we can do to improve their lives, at the heart of everything we do.



Think Dad

The support from fathers and partners in pregnancy, birth and across the early years is invaluable, yet some fathers tell us they feel excluded from support and services. We will do more to meet the needs of fathers and partners and partners, celebrating their role. Our best start workforce will be confident to successfully engage Dads.



Developing our workforce

(all those who have regular contact with families)

The people who support parents, parents-to-be, babies, and young children across Nottinghamshire are our greatest asset. We will invest in their knowledge and skills and support them to use evidence-based resources.



Low-income areas

It is children living in the areas of greatest deprivation who have the poorest outcomes. Wherever possible we will target the work we do in our areas of greatest deprivation. We will work to understand the unique assets and challenges of local communities.



Inclusion

We will remove barriers that prevent families from participating and engaging with local services. We will consider the needs of all our families in everything we do, including those who are neuro-diverse, those who struggle to access online and digital information, those who speak languages other than English or have specific cultural needs, and those whose babies begin life in neonatal care.

Enablers

- **Community and voluntary sector** - To better reach and support families in Nottinghamshire, we need to engage people and services in the community and voluntary sector, who often work in local neighbourhoods and are trusted by families.
- **Information sharing and IT systems** – There needs to be good communication and appropriate information sharing between the people and services that support families, for the benefit of families.
- **Advice, information and guidance** – Families need easy access to trusted digital information and advice in one place. Our best start system will communicate key information and advice to families in a consistent, joined-up way.
- **Evidence of what works** – Everything we do will be underpinned by evidence about what works to give children the best possible start in life.
- **Close working across the Integrated Care System** – the Nottinghamshire best start strategic partnership is committed to delivering these priorities in close partnership with Nottingham City - recognising that we are part of a single Integrated Care System, and because the lives of our families' cross borders. This will put us in the best place to respond and adapt to changes introduced as part of Local Government and/or NHS reforms.



Delivering on this strategy

Key outcomes

Ultimately, we will know we have made a difference if there is an improvement in the proportion of children:

- Achieving a good level of development measured by the Ages and Stages Questionnaire at age 2 to 2.5 years
 - Achieving a good level of development measured in Reception by the Early Years Foundation Stage profile
- particularly in our more deprived communities.

Lots of factors affect these indicators of child development. It can take many years for impact to be seen and changes in wider society can have a lasting influence.

Voices of families

- Feedback from our families will help us understand their experience of raising babies and young children in Nottinghamshire.
- Parent-carer panels will be developed linked to Family Hub Networks.
- We will make sure parent voice is heard on the Best Start Strategic Partnership.
- We will consider the voice of the infant and child.

Best start data dashboard

- Collecting the right data is an important part of measuring and monitoring impact. We will develop a best start data dashboard that reflects key outcome measures relating to efforts to give every child the best start in life.
- The best start data dashboard will be developed in partnership with the wider Integrated Care System (meaning Nottingham City will be included too), and will be accessible to the people and services working with families across our system.

Delivery plans

A champion will be identified for each priority area and detailed delivery plans will be worked up. Wherever possible we will work across the whole Integrated Care System, including Nottingham City, because we know how important joined up work is.

Governance

Direct reporting relationship

**Nottinghamshire Health
and Well Being Board**

**Nottinghamshire Best Start
Strategic Partnership**

**Series of task and finish groups and / or
communities of practice to be identified**

Indirect reporting relationship / interface

**ICS Children and Young
People's Board**

**Children and Young People's
Strategic Commissioning
Group**

**Local Maternity and
Neonatal Systems**

**The Best Start Strategic Partnership is
currently made up of representatives from
the following organisations:**

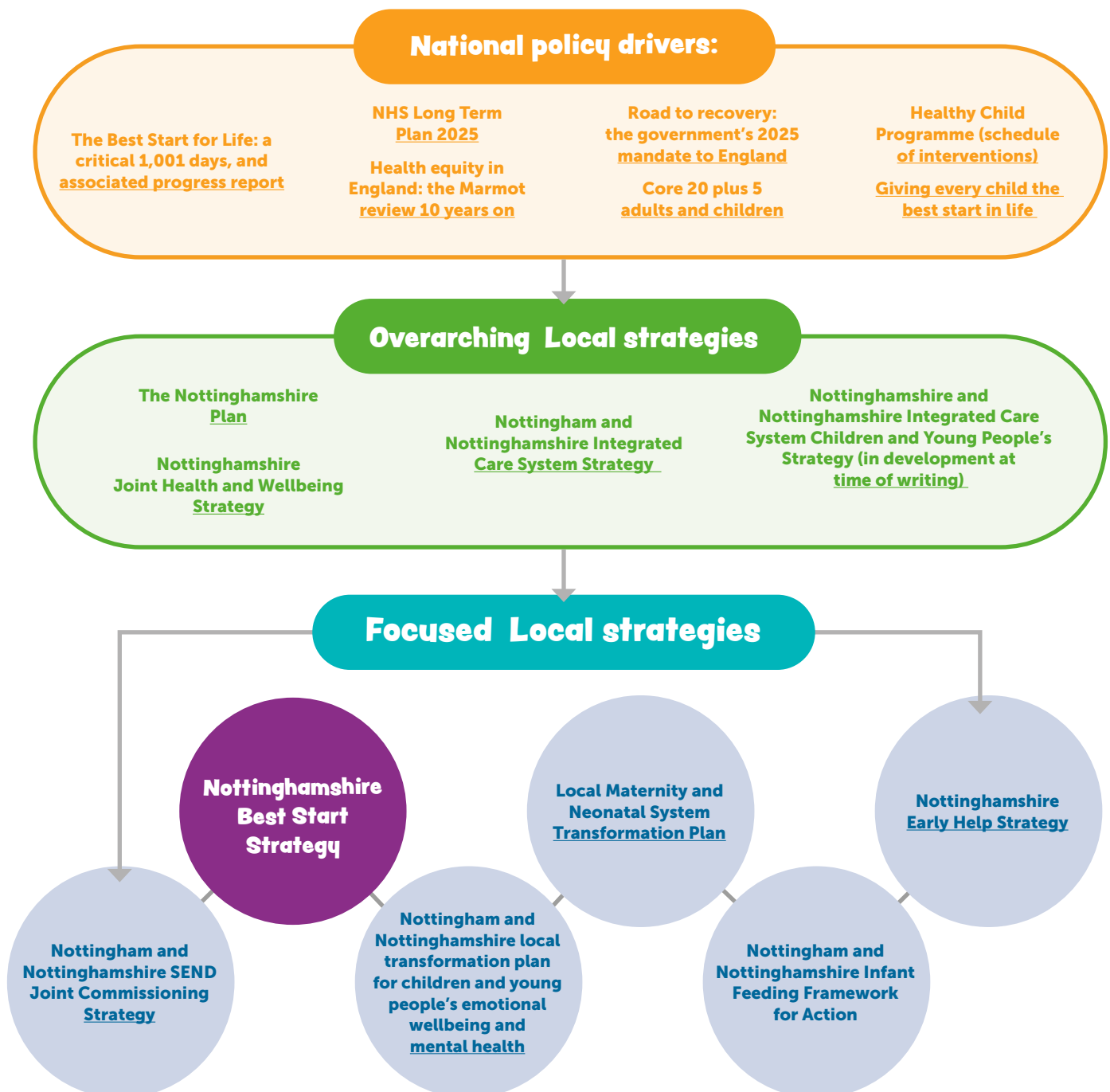
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust
- Sherwood Forest Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board
- Bassetlaw Place Based Partnership
- Mid-Nottinghamshire Place Based Partnership
- South Nottinghamshire Place Based Partnership
- University of Nottingham

Further members are welcome.



Appendix: Key strategies and policy drivers

The Nottinghamshire Best Start Strategy directly supports the delivery of key national and local priorities and has been designed to complement, not duplicate, the work of other local strategies.



Please note this summarises the key areas of interface between the Nottinghamshire Best Start Strategy other local strategies and national policy drivers. It is in no way intended as an exhaustive list.



**...giving children
the best start**