

**EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL**

Report to: Health and Wellbeing Board
16 October 2025

Wards: All

Reflections from 22 May 'Deep Dive' Session on School Readiness

Report of the Executive Director of Children, Families and Schools

A. Executive Summary

The Health and Wellbeing Board hosted its latest 'Deep Dive' thematic workshop on 22 May 2025, focusing on school readiness. This session explored system-wide challenges, current initiatives, and opportunities to improve children's preparedness for starting school. The discussion surfaced a clear desire to provide information and advice as early as possible, intervene earlier when warning signs emerge, align services, and engage more effectively with parents. This report outlines the key themes, challenges, and recommendations emerging from the session, highlighting the need for a system wide response to school readiness.

B. Council Priorities

Helping Children and Young People Achieve
Empowering and Supporting Communities

C. Lead Portfolio

Children, families and education

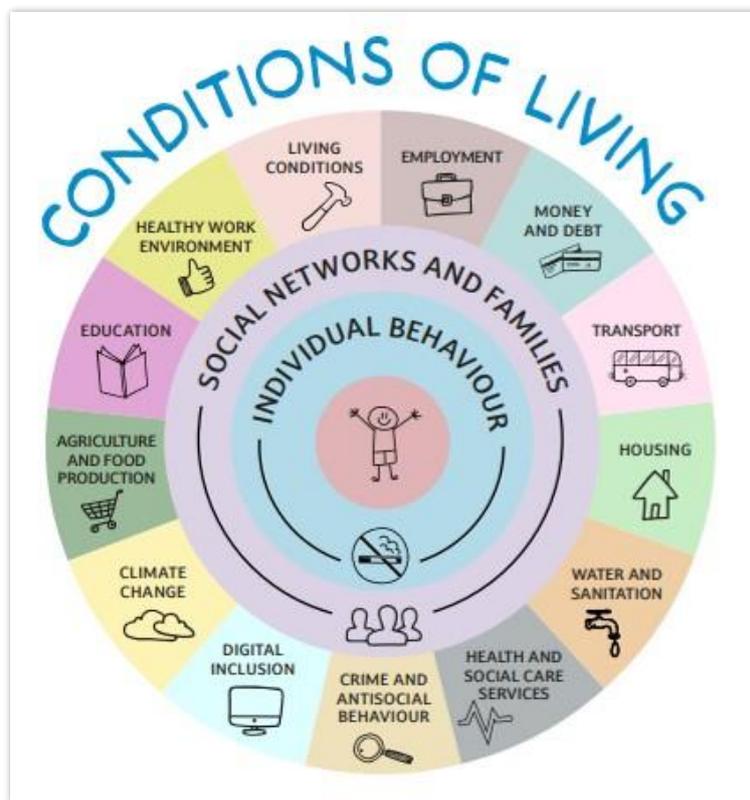
D. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

- (a) Note the findings from the deep dive
- (b) Endorse the theory of change outlined under Appendix 2
- (c) Note the establishment of a school readiness steering group within the structure of the Children and Families Partnership Board, consisting of membership from across our system, to take this work forward.

1. The Purpose of the 'Deep Dive' Workshops

- 1.1 At its meeting on 21 September 2023, the Board approved the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 - 2028 (minute 34/23 refers). One core element of the strategy is to take a step back and think about the root causes of an individual's health and wellbeing and the wider conditions in which residents live. There are various factors at play in that context which the diagram below maps out:



1.2 To complement the strategy’s delivery, the Board agreed to host ‘Deep Dive’ sessions, each related to a theme from the Conditions of Living wheel. Each session would be hosted and shaped by subject matter experts. In bringing together a variety of partners, these sessions aim to help the Board:

- Understand work being undertaken across the system, learning from successes and challenges
- Develop a more holistic understanding of the issues facing residents
- Guide successful initiatives to improve the conditions of living
- Develop stronger working partnerships with networks across the system

1.3 Following each session key themes, opportunities, and challenges are fed back to the Board.

1.4 The May 2025 session focused on school readiness – an area where early intervention can yield significant long-term benefits for educational attainment, health outcomes, and life chances. A list of attendees can be found under Appendix 1.

2 What is School Readiness and Why is it a Health and Wellbeing Issue?

2.1 The early years foundation stage (EYFS) identifies school readiness as: “The broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life.”

2.2 School Readiness refers to the skills and developmental milestones which a child is expected to develop and reach by 4/5 years old - the time which they start reception year at Primary school. Some refer to school readiness as “reaching a good level of development” or “reaching developmental milestones”

2.3 The recent ‘Ready for Reception’ guidance, co-created by a number of children’s organisations, public sector bodies and charities, which was explored at the workshop, highlights four key areas which make up school readiness (see Appendix 1 for more detail on these areas):

- Growing Independence
- Building relationships and communicating
- Physical development
- Healthy Routines

2.4 At the end of reception, children are assessed against seventeen early learning goals and to achieve a good level of development they must achieve the expected standard in the first twelve. These goals also contribute to our understanding of school readiness.

1. Listening, attention and understanding,
2. Speaking
3. Building relationships
4. Managing self
5. Self-regulation
6. Fine motor skills
7. Gross motor skills
8. Comprehension
9. Reading
10. Writing
11. Numbers
12. Numerical patterns
13. Past and present
14. People culture and communities
15. The natural world
16. Being imaginative and expressive
17. Creating with materials

2.5 Overall, school readiness refers to the broad set of skills a child will require to function in school and beyond. This does not only mean academic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics, but emotional, physical and social skills including being able to use the toilet by themselves, and brush their teeth, socialise and communicate with others, leaving their parents for the day to attend school, use a pen and pencil, and use cutlery and an open top cup, read a book. They should also be able to express how they are feeling, sit still in order to listen carefully and pay attention.

2.6 If a child does not meet these developmental milestones by age five, the impact on the child, the school, and beyond can be severe. In the short term, they will struggle with basic learning, behaviour, and social interaction, requiring disproportionate teacher attention and support. Over the medium term, these gaps typically widen, leading to lower academic attainment, poorer self-esteem, and increased likelihood of being referred for additional help. Long term, early developmental delays correlate with lower qualifications, reduced employment prospects, poorer mental and physical health, and greater reliance on public services. This translates into higher costs in education, health, and welfare, a less skilled workforce, and deeper cycles of inequality. Early missed milestones often set a trajectory of lifelong disadvantage.

2.7 To successfully meet these milestones, work does not start at age five but requires work from birth and strong partnership working between all involved. Families need to create a nurturing home environment, supported by health visitors monitoring development and providing early guidance. Early years settings, such as nurseries and childminders, play a crucial role in fostering language, social, and physical skills,

while local authorities and public health teams must ensure access to high-quality childcare, parenting programmes, and targeted interventions for vulnerable families. Success depends on a coordinated, cross-sector approach where health, education, and social care professionals work together to identify delays early, intervene effectively, and ensure every child is supported to thrive before they reach the school gate.

- 2.8 Therefore, school readiness is a health and wellbeing issue in its broadest sense, and is something which all partner's influence. It directly affects not only a child's lifelong physical and mental health, but also the wider determinants of health across the population. By prioritising school readiness, and supporting a system wide response to this issue, the Health and Wellbeing Board can drive a preventative, whole-system approach—bringing together health services, early years providers, the local authority, education, and the voluntary sector to support children and families from birth, reduce demand on crisis services, and improve the future health and wellbeing for residents.

3 First Workshop Activity - Understanding Different Perspectives

- 3.1 In preparation for the workshop, colleagues from Corporate Resources, Public Health and the Children, Families and Schools directorate sought to understand the different perspectives from key groups involved in school readiness and child development in the East Riding.
- 3.2 The goal of this engagement was to spend more time in the workshop finding opportunities and creating actions based on a wide range of views.
- 3.3 The main groups identified were:
- Parents
 - Primary Schools
 - Nurseries
 - Health Visitors
 - Early help teams (such as Children's centres)
 - Clinical and healthcare professionals
- 3.4 Therefore, four meetings with key forums aligning to the above groups, took place between March and April 2025:
- Primary Heads Forum, 25 March
 - Children Centre Colleagues, 2 April
 - Managers of Integrated Specialist Public Health Nursing Service (ISPHNS) 0 – 19 Service, 25 April
 - Private, Voluntary and Independent Nursery Managers, 29 April
- 3.5 These took place alongside engagement work undertaken by East Riding Healthwatch who spoke with a range of families and parents in the Driffield area during March and April 2025.
- 3.6 The main themes from this engagement work were shared at the workshop. Attendees were invited to reflect on the varying perspectives and consider:

- Key differences in opinion
- Any surprising insights
- Comments that resonated
- Questions raised by the feedback
- Who else should be consulted and what further questions need asking

3.7 While the table conversations didn't follow this format precisely, some of the key themes which emerged included:

3.7.1 Surprise at smartphones not being mentioned during engagement. Attendees felt that smartphones and instant access to social media have huge implications for school readiness, not just for children but parents also.

3.7.2 The question if we are facing a post COVID 'blip' or a long-term cultural shift. A number of attendees noted that the engagement work suggests that this has been longer, gradual decline accelerated by COVID.

3.7.3 Attendees noted a growing gap between parental and teacher expectations.

3.7.4 A need to engage with parents beyond Driffield was identified, focussing in on families whose children are not ready for school where possible.

3.7.5 Nurseries are crucial in this work. Attendees felt that focussing on primary school is too late and opportunities to work with families have been missed. With the changes in provision for child care coming into force this year, there is potential to ensure more children are ready for school. This requires significant and engagement with nurseries and the development of a consistent approach and a set of consistent expectations.

3.7.6 Many attendees noted that the two sets of health checks at two/two and half years of age, conducted by the Integrated Specialist Public Health Nursing Service (ISPHNS, delivered by Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust) and Nurseries need to be aligned.

3.7.7 There was a consensus that focussing on these milestones months before school is too late, and that work must start at birth, if not prenatally. All guidance needs to be aligned to ensure clear messages cut through.

3.7.8 Overall attendees welcomed this initial engagement work and suggested that more detailed and consistent engagement work with these groups take place when designing any school readiness initiatives, especially parents, families and nurseries.

4 Second Workshop Activity- Scoping a Universal System Response

4.1 Following this, the second activity of the workshop was focussed on scoping a potential, universal/blanket approach to school readiness in the East Riding.

4.2 To help inform this discussion, the school readiness approach from Halton Borough Council was shared, who have used the recent Ready for Reception Guidance (see point 2.3) to develop a series of digital bitesize messages to act as push notifications for parents. Parents can sign up to these notifications through their Digital Family Hub website, and the notifications can be sent via phone notifications, text messages and email. The idea was to create easy to read messages which cut through the noise, giving parents practical activities and goals every few days.

- 4.3 Some key themes and ideas which emerged during this discussion were:
- 4.3.1 Attaching the ready for reception to school offer letters as soon as possible as a blanket approach.
 - 4.3.2 In time, highlighting this guidance in other ways the Council contacts families with a longer-term view of embedding this guidance into NHS correspondence to families.
 - 4.3.3 The creation of “school readiness champions” in local areas. Friendly local parents who have been through these challenges and can offer informal advice. Soft play for children alongside coffee for parents would be a great forum for these champions and would allow mums and dads to meet others facing similar issues and gain perspective.
 - 4.3.4 While we should publish the ready for reception guidance in full. Much like Halton Borough Council, there is a need to break down this guidance into key, quick, messages and use relevant social media outlets to push messages such as reels on Instagram and TikTok style videos. Key messages should be short and snappy.
 - 4.3.5 Attendees eventually wanted to see a universal offer which was linked to a specialist offer, where struggling families could ‘step up’ with more support, and ‘step down’ when appropriate to the universal offer.
 - 4.3.6 The two sets of health checks at two and two-and-a-half should be jointly commissioned to ensure linkage and alignment.
 - 4.3.7 While the ready for reception guidance was welcomed, some attendees felt the need to pick out five or even three key behaviours/skills we really want to focus on, based on data and intelligence. Toilet training was one of these skills. Skills which impact learning time should be prioritised.
 - 4.3.8 Public health have successfully utilised a number of behaviour change models in other initiatives. Utilising these models to fit the local context could be an area to explore in the future when developing more focussed approaches.

5 Theory of Change

- 5.1 A Theory of Change (ToC) was developed following the workshop session to summarise the proposed strategic approach to improving school readiness in the East Riding. It provides a visual map showing how a series of interventions are expected to achieve their intended outcomes. The ToC sets out a logical sequence from inputs and activities, through to short-term and long-term outcomes, and ultimately the overall goal. The full ToC is included in Appendix 2.
- 5.2 ToCs help to break down complex objectives into clear steps. They make the links between actions and outcomes explicit and identify the assumptions behind these links. They also help to consider wider contextual factors that might support or hinder success.
- 5.3 Each component of a ToC is designed to be measurable. This enables evaluation throughout the process.
- 5.4 As part of the deep dive, participants were asked to consider what the East Riding ‘system’s’ strategic approach to improving school readiness should be. This included identifying who should lead the work, the core elements of the approach, the actions required, and how existing resources could be used effectively.

- 5.5 The ToC brings together these ideas. It sets out the main resources and activities discussed, and groups the expected results into broader themes ('outputs') which contribute to short- and long-term outcomes. The ToC will be used as a foundation for developing a more detailed action plan. This work should be taken forward by a suitable early years group or partnership within existing local structures.
- 5.6 The ToC highlights key components of the proposed approach, including early intervention, consistent messaging, peer and community support, effective use of guidance, and behaviour change methods. Together, these are intended to strengthen the universal offer while ensuring targeted support reaches those who need it most.
- 5.7 The next step is to refine the ToC by working backwards from the intended impact. This means identifying what assumptions and contextual factors must be in place and outlining ways to track success at each stage. The process should begin with defining what 'improved school readiness' means in measurable terms, using insights gathered through the workshop. Doing this for each part of the ToC will support development of a practical, targeted action plan. It is recommended that this work is led by the appropriate early years group or partnership in East Riding, with the aim of using this ToC to develop a more detailed action plan.

6 Initial Scoping Questions

- 6.1 Within the scoping document presented to the Board on 20 March (Minute 22/25 refers) there were two guiding questions for this session. These questions are laid out below along with some answers following the workshop.
- 6.2 What factors make school readiness a system-wide issue requiring collective action and a coordinated response?
- 6.2.1 It is widely documented, and agreed in discussions the workshop, that a child who is not ready for school, and who has not met their developmental goals by age five will more than likely face immediate challenges in accessing the curriculum, building relationships, and regulating their behaviour. These early struggles often lead to lower academic achievement, reduced confidence, and disengagement from learning. Over time, the gaps widen, increasing the risk of long-term difficulties such as school exclusion, mental health issues, lower employment prospects, and poorer health outcomes.
- 6.2.2 Furthermore, many attendees suggested that a significant number of children currently on speech and language waiting lists may have had complex needs that could have been mitigated through a sustained focus on meeting developmental goals earlier in life. Attendees from across health and care organisations highlighted the downstream impact of children not reaching these goals—pointing to increased demand for specialist services, including speech and language therapy, mental health support, and educational interventions. Many believed that much of this pressure could be alleviated through earlier, community-based support focused on prevention, early identification, and universal access to developmentally rich environments with a sustained focus on meeting developmental goals.
- 6.2.3 Therefore, attendees agreed that school readiness warrants a coordinated approach due to its potential impact on all our work. Not only does school unreadiness cause lost learning time, impacting teachers' ability to teach others, but it also impacts health and wellbeing later in life.

6.3 What should our strategic approach be, and where should it sit in existing structures?

6.3.1 Attendees agreed that, while the workshop provided a useful forum to voice concerns and ideas in regard to school readiness, limited progress would be made unless a dedicated group or workstream adopted these recommendations.

6.3.2 Many agreed that this group must be a partnership effort, with representation from all member organisations of the Health and Wellbeing Board alongside schools, nurseries and other relevant organisations

6.3.3 A number of attendees identified the Children and Families Partnership, as a potential 'home' for this work due to its existing remit and membership.

6.3.4 While a definite strategic approach did not emerge from the workshop, it was broadly agreed that, as a system, we should:

- Agree a universal set of school readiness guidance to use consistently across all partnership organisations (such as the Ready for Reception Guidance).
- Communicate this guidance to all parents at as many stages as touchpoints as possible.
- Select key messages that, we as a system, want to focus on, developing short communications to push these messages.
- Identify and develop pathways where children who are falling behind can be identified early and provided relevant support alongside their family.

7 Developments since the workshop and Next Steps

7.1 Following the school readiness workshop, the Department for Education has published a new national strategy: Best Start in Life (July 2025). The central ambition is that, by 2028, 75% of five-year-olds across England will achieve a good level of development (GLD) (see 2.4 for definition). The current national figure is 68%; in the East Riding, it is 67%. To achieve this, national government has developed a programme of reform and investment across three main areas:

7.1.1 **Better Support for Families.** A new Best Start Family Service will be established in every local authority area, funded by central government. This will include the roll-out of Best Start Family Hubs and a national digital parenting offer. These hubs are expected to provide joined-up support across health, early years, parenting and wider services, with targeted outreach to families in disadvantaged communities.

7.1.2 **More accessible early education and childcare.** From September 2025, working families will be entitled to 30 funded hours of childcare per week from the term after their child turns nine months, up to school age. The strategy emphasises improved access for low-income families and children with SEND. Additional investment will support the expansion of school-based nursery places and funding to promote inclusive provision.

7.1.3 **Improving quality in early years including reception.** Measures include a renewed focus on raising standards in the early years workforce, greater access to evidence-based programmes, and strengthened support for inclusive and early intervention practice. Reception year is identified as a key national priority.

- 7.2 The strategy also sets out a number of expectations for local government and its partners:
 - 7.2.1 Each local authority will be required to develop a Best Start Local Plan, co-produced with local stakeholders and communities, and aligned with the national 2028 milestone.
 - 7.2.2 Local plans must be informed by data and target-setting. National government will set specific statutory targets for each area, drawn from the emerging Local Government Outcomes Framework, using powers under Part 1 of the Childcare Act 2006. These duties will extend to relevant partners, placing a formal obligation to collaborate.
 - 7.2.3 Local delivery is expected to prioritise early years outcomes and reduce inequalities, with an emphasis on inclusive provision and improved access in areas of disadvantage.
 - 7.2.4 The strategy also outlines steps to improve information sharing between services. The forthcoming Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will introduce a new statutory duty on organisations to share information relevant to safeguarding and promoting welfare. In parallel, a pilot for a single unique identifier for children is underway, designed to improve the consistency and reliability of multi-agency data. These developments aim to ensure that professionals – including those working in Best Start Family Hubs – can access and share timely, accurate information to deliver the right support at the right time.
- 7.3 The East Riding of Yorkshire Council will receive an initial development grant of £155,000. This will support preparations for Best Start Family Hubs, including readiness to implement parenting and Home Learning Environment (HLE) evidence-based interventions from April 2026.
- 7.4 There will be further funding for delivery of Best Start Family Hubs, including local services for babies, children, parents and carers, from April 2026. This funding will be for 3 years – 2026-27 to 2028-29 and guidance will be provided on programme design, including branding, in time to support service delivery from April 2026.
- 7.5 There are three key objectives for the use of the current development grant:
 - 7.5.1 Identify at least one Best Start Family Hub site by January 2026 – preferably in an area of high deprivation, as highlighted in the national strategy.
 - 7.5.2 Prepare to deliver parenting and HLE interventions from April 2026 – focusing on evidence-based interventions for families with 3–4-year-olds, a key group for achieving the 2028 GLD goals.
 - 7.5.3 Strengthen local delivery plans – building on existing early years work to lead education, health and community partners in increasing the number of children achieving GLD. Plans must identify local needs, address gaps, and integrate services.
- 7.6 The Council and partners already provide a range of parenting and early years support, including:
 - 7.6.1 Solihull Parenting Approach: Seventeen online guides for parents, young people and professionals, covering all stages of child development. There are also resources on brain development for young people, and guidance on how adult trauma may affect parenting. A face-to-face group and one-to-one offer will follow. Staff are being trained

in summer 2025, with delivery to begin in autumn. A “train the trainer” model will also be available for partners.

- 7.6.2 Reducing parental conflict training: Delivered through the East Riding Safeguarding Partnership, providing skills to help families resolve conflict and understand the impact of unresolved issues.
- 7.6.3 Pathway sessions and play groups: Currently provided in all children’s centres, with content under review.
- 7.6.4 Home learning support: Offered through children’s centre groups and activities, Portage, Early Years Inclusion, the Early Years Team, maintained nurseries, private, voluntary and independent settings (PVI), and childminders.
- 7.6.5 Early communication pathway: In development with health partners to support early identification of need and reduce waiting times.
- 7.6.6 Other partner programmes: Including infant feeding and antenatal education, which will sit under other funding streams within the Best Start Family Hubs programme.
- 7.7 The new national strategy and associated funding align closely with the priorities identified through the school readiness workshop. The existing parenting offer demonstrates that East Riding partners are already in a good position to address many of these themes.
- 7.8 In light of these developments, an item on this work was presented at the Children and Families Partnership on 22 September 2025. It was agreed that there would be value in establishing, or nominating, a group to take forward the findings from the school readiness workshop, including the draft theory of change. The first meeting of this group is scheduled for the week commencing 20 October. It is important to emphasise that this coordinating function will have system wide representation.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 A workshop on school readiness was held on 22 May 2025 including members of the Health Wellbeing Board and subject matter experts. This report summarises the key discussions, findings and recommendations from that session.
- 8.2 The workshop confirmed that school readiness is a complex issue requiring a coordinated, system-wide response. There was strong support for this work to be taken forward through existing structures, such as the Children and Families Partnership. It was agreed that any work moving forward must be a partnership effort.
- 8.3 To support this, a Theory of Change has been developed (see Appendix 2). It sets out how different actions and interventions can work together to improve school readiness and reduce health inequalities.
- 8.4 The Theory of Change will now need to be refined and used to develop a practical action plan by an appropriate partnership group. This should define key measures of success and be shaped by insights from across the system.
- 8.5 The action plan should be led by an appropriate group, with broad representation across health, education, early years and family services, to ensure a joined-up and

sustainable approach. This was raised at the Children and Families Partnership at its meeting on 22 September and an appropriate steering group will be nominated or established.

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Background Papers: East Riding Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 - 2028

Assessments/Considerations

	Yes/No/NA
Appropriate Consultation (Section 3 Report Writers Guide)	Yes
Equality Analysis Screening Tool	N/A
Data Protection Impact Assessment (Stage 1)	N/A
Health in All Policies Assessment	N/A
Environmental Sustainability Appraisal (Climate Change)	N/A
Armed Forces Covenant	N/A
Risk Register	N/A
Value for Money	N/A

Appendix 1 –List of Attendees:

- Executive head of Maintained Nurseries

- Youth Engagement Project Officer - Healthwatch East Riding
- Delivery Manager - Healthwatch East Riding

- Director of Operations - HEY Mind

- Professional Lead Speech and Language Therapy - Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust,

- Assistant Director for Community Integration - NHS Humber and North Yorkshire ICB
- Senior Mental Health Commissioning Manager - NHS Humber and North Yorkshire ICB

- Deputy Leader - ERYC Member
- Portfolio Holder Adults, Health and Care (Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board) - ERYC Member
- Chair of Health, Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Sub-committee - ERYC Member
- Portfolio Holder for Children, Families and Schools - ERYC Member

- Interim Chief Executive - ERYC
- Director of Public Health - ERYC
- Interim director of children and young people, education and schools - ERYC
- Head of Service for Early Help - ERYC
- Policy, Partnerships & Intelligence Manager - ERYC
- Strategic Manager Early Years Education - ERYC
- Business Change Programme Manager for Children, Families and Schools - ERYC
- Public Health Specialist - ERYC
- Principal Public Health Intelligence Analyst - ERYC
- Family Help, Area Manager West - ERYC
- Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist - ERYC
- Early Years Inclusion Coordinator. - ERYC
- Early Years Area SENCo, North - ERYC

Appendix 2: Theory of Change for Improving School Readiness in the East Riding of Yorkshire

Created using insights from the May 2025 Health and Wellbeing Board Deep Dive (see section 5).
 N.b. All items shown below are key examples and/or high-level themes, not an exhaustive list.

