

2026

Closing the gap where it matters most

How Babyzone reaches the families furthest from the Government's Good Level of Development goal, through a place-based approach.



The first years last forever

Every major challenge our society faces, including poor health, low educational attainment, unemployment, crime and inequality, has its roots in the first five years of life; while more than 80 per cent of brain development occurs before the age of three.

In December 2024 the UK Government recognised that the early years require improvement and set a landmark target: 75 per cent of five-year-olds reaching a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028. The national average in 2025 stands at 68.3 per cent, and in the most income-deprived neighbourhoods it is 59 per cent. The cost of this missed opportunity is estimated at **£16 billion per year** in England alone (Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood / LSE, *Big Change Starts Small*, 2021).

This briefing makes one central argument: **the 75 per cent target will be won or lost at home, years before reception.** The strongest single predictor of a child's development at four and a half is not the early education setting but the home learning environment, and it is there that the gap between richer and poorer households first appears. A good level of development at five does not cease to matter at the school gate; it is the foundation on which the rest of a child's trajectory is built, and children who are not school ready at four to five are nearly three times as likely to be NEET as teenagers (Warburton and colleagues, BMC Public Health, 2024). Meeting the target therefore means reaching the families furthest from it, in the communities where universal services struggle most.

Babyzone runs free, drop-in community hubs for families with children aged 0 to 5, located in the communities with the greatest need; across our eight established English hubs, 74% of family visits come from the 40% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally. We equip parents with the confidence and skills to support their child's development at home through our own programmes and evidence-based classes, including Everyday Maths, social-emotional programmes (NEST), baby massage, sensory, science and movement classes.

We select our locations based on a number of factors, including where the gap to the 75 per cent target is greatest, using deprivation data to identify communities with the highest levels of child poverty and the weakest early years outcomes. We then work with those communities before a hub opens, consulting with local families, partner organisations and statutory services to understand what provision already exists, what is missing, and what families themselves say they need. We equip parents with confidence, knowledge and competence to support their child's development and improve the home learning environment.

OUR MISSION

To empower parents to help their babies and toddlers thrive, so that all children aged 0 to 5, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, get the best possible start in life.

What the model delivers

100k+

Parent & child visits

74%

From 40% most income-deprived neighbourhoods

83%

Built community connections

95%

Rated classes positive for child

91%

Reported improved confidence

“

Venues like these show that families engage with services delivered with trust and compassion. As the government rolls out its Best Start Family Hubs, they should look to organisations like Babyzone as an example of an integrated, community-led model of support that is working so well.

Dame Rachel de Souza — Children’s Commissioner for England

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Babyzone is a great example of how warm, welcoming community spaces help families connect, access services and feel supported. It reflects the ambition behind the Family Hubs programme: bringing help together in one place so families get what they need, when they need it.

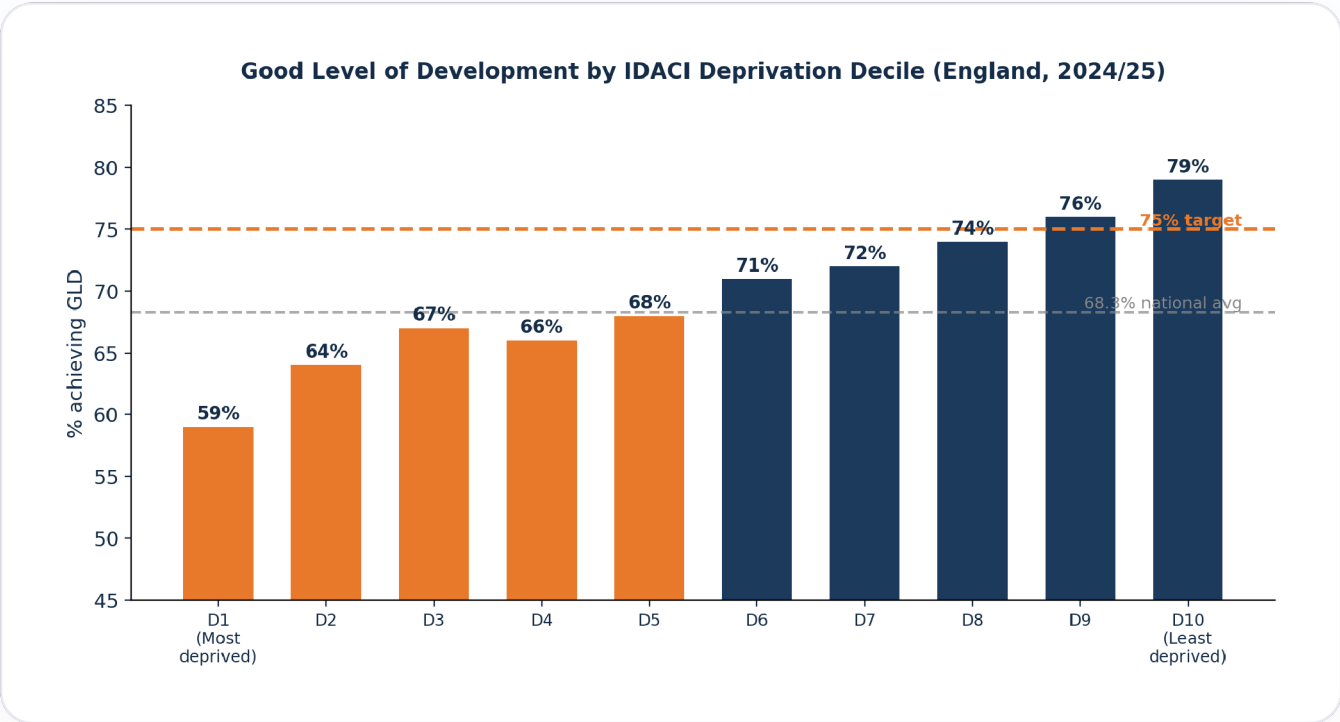
Olivia Bailey MP — *former* Minister for Early Education



GLD and the 75% target

The Government’s Plan for Change (HM Government, December 2024) placed early childhood development at the heart of its Opportunity Mission. The 75 per cent target would require an estimated 40,000 to 45,000 additional children per year to reach the standard (UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, October 2025). The July 2025 Best Start in Life strategy (Department for Education (DfE), *Best Start in Life: A Vision for the Early Years*) outlined the delivery plan, with record £9.5 billion investment and a commitment to spread evidence-based programmes.

Progress in recent years has been steady but modest: the average share of children reaching a GLD rose from 65.2 per cent in 2021/22 to 68.3 per cent in 2024/25 (DfE, Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Results 2024/25). At approximately one percentage point per year, current progress will fall short of the target without a significant change in approach, focused on those furthest from it.



The steep deprivation gradient in early outcomes: children in the most deprived neighbourhoods start school furthest from the 75 per cent target. Source: DfE EYFSP Results 2024/25 (IDACI 2025 update).

What a good level of development can and cannot tell us

A good level of development is a rounded judgement, made by a child's reception teacher at the end of the year, that the child has reached the expected standard across the twelve early learning goals that matter most for what follows: communication and language; personal, social and emotional development; physical development; literacy; and mathematics. Its breadth is its strength: it considers the whole child rather than a single skill, and it is the only universal, national measure available of how children are developing at five. The Government's target, that 75 per cent of children reach that standard by 2028, is a welcome ambition that places early childhood at the centre of the opportunity agenda.

No single indicator, however, can carry everything the target is now being asked to represent. Professor Eva Lloyd of the University of East London has described it as a risky target, on the grounds that it is the sole national measure of early development and that development at this age is inherently difficult to assess (Oral evidence to the House of Commons Education Committee, 11 November 2025). The wider evidence reinforces the concern, showing the disadvantage gap at the end of the reception year widening rather than narrowing, with children from low-income families and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) remaining furthest from the standard (Education Policy Institute, Annual Report 2025).

The limitations are practical ones. GLD is a lagging indicator, recorded at the end of reception, so it shows where a child has arrived rather than identifying in good time who needs help, by which point many gaps are already embedded. It is a judgement rather than a test, a teacher's best-fit assessment that has carried no external moderation since the 2021 reforms, which is why the DfE itself cautions that results are not directly comparable year to year. It is also a partial picture, counting only twelve of the seventeen early learning goals and omitting two whole areas, understanding the world and expressive arts and design. It is uneven, too: children with SEND are often not yet identified at five and are under-represented, summer-born children are systematically disadvantaged, and a not-ready label, as Julian Grenier has observed, tells us that a child is behind without telling us what to do about it (J. Grenier, Tes, November 2025).

None of this is an argument against the target; each is a reason to read it well. Babyzone therefore never relies on an area's average GLD alone, but examines the breakdown by deprivation: GLD shows where the developmental gap lies, while deprivation data show where the children are and whether we are reaching them (the method is set out in full in Appendix A). Because development at five is shaped by so much beyond any one service, from the home learning environment to health, income, housing and the month in which a child was born, we do not claim sole credit for movement in a single figure. We hold ourselves to account against what families tell us and do, namely confidence, behaviour change and learning carried home, which we track through the Parent Confidence Index alongside GLD itself.

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It is a risky target, because it is the only target and there are many issues around measuring this development.

Professor Eva Lloyd — Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood, University of East London (oral evidence to the House of Commons Education Committee, 11 November 2025)

Why a good level of development decides life chances

The case for reaching the 75 per cent target concerns not only five-year-olds but who those five-year-olds become.

In May 2026 the Government published *Young People and Work*, the independent review led by Alan Milburn into why nearly one million young people aged 16 to 24 are now not in education, employment or training, one in eight and rising. The review's central finding is that the problem does not begin at 16 but considerably earlier, and that the system can anticipate it. Research using the Connected Bradford dataset (Warburton and colleagues, *BMC Public Health*, 2024) found that children who were not school ready at four to five were nearly three times as likely to be NEET at 16 to 17: eleven per cent, against four per cent of those who were school ready.

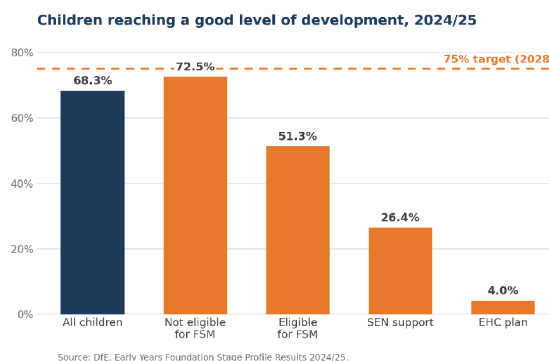
The mechanism is a compounding one. A child who reaches a good level of development proceeds to stronger attainment at each key stage, whereas a child who does not tends to remain behind. The link between school readiness at five and becoming NEET as a teenager runs primarily through this academic pathway, with a further direct effect in addition. Missing early building blocks do not remain in the early years; they propagate forward. This is why we begin at conception, helping parents to become more confident, knowledgeable and competent, to create the best possible home learning environment, and to support their children to thrive.



Inequality in reaching a good level of development

Children eligible for free school meals are more than 21 percentage points less likely to reach a good level of development by five (51.3 per cent against 72.5 per cent). For children with SEND the picture is more pronounced still: only two in ten children with any identified special educational need reach GLD, and only approximately 4 per cent of those with an Education, Health and Care Plan. These are the same characteristics, disadvantage and SEND, that the Milburn review identifies among the strongest early predictors of a NEET future.

The review's most uncomfortable conclusion is that the system already knows. Poor school readiness, disadvantage and SEND are recorded and measured, yet too rarely acted upon early enough, consistently enough, or at sufficient scale. Spending, meanwhile, has moved in the wrong direction: prevention in the early years has been reduced while crisis spending downstream, on late intervention and income replacement, has grown. The review puts the annual cost of youth economic inactivity at approximately £125 billion, more than the country spends on education. We are paying more, and later, to manage outcomes that could have been shaped earlier and at far lower cost. The 75 per cent target is likely to shift focus towards those closest to the threshold, and risks neglecting those furthest from it.



The gap opens at five: the share of children reaching a good level of development in 2024/25 by free-school-meal and SEND status. Source: DfE Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Results 2024/25.

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Where they intersect, the effect is not additive, but multiplicative. Vulnerabilities compound from the earliest age. The system sees this. It does not act on it early enough, consistently enough, or at sufficient scale.

George Looker — CEO, Babyzone

A gap that is already embedded by age five

The gap is already present on the day it is measured, and it rarely closes of its own accord.

The deprivation gradient is steep. Children in the most deprived areas are approximately 20 percentage points behind their peers. Literacy is the weakest domain, at 70 per cent meeting expectations, and boys eligible for free school meals are furthest behind, with 43 per cent achieving GLD (DfE EYFSP 2024/25). Without deliberate targeting, there is a real risk that the families furthest from the 75 per cent target, those for whom universal strategies are least likely to work, are the families that government investment will fail to reach. Babyzone works with communities to identify gaps in early years provision, to make provision accessible, and to convene organisations so that families have a single place to obtain support.

The scale of the challenge is underlined by the Centre for Young Lives' *Starting Well* report (June 2026), which found that the disadvantage gap widened by a further 0.7 percentage points last year, with 43.5 per cent of boys eligible for free school meals reaching GLD. Two fifths of the disadvantage gap visible at age 16 is already present at age five. The entire educational trajectory rests upon the earliest years, and this is the point at which intervention is both most effective and least expensive.

“Accountability without power”

Local authorities bear accountability for early years outcomes but lack sufficient control over the levers required to deliver them. Where statutory infrastructure is constrained, independent, community-embedded provision fills a gap that the system cannot fill on its own. This is the space that Babyzone can occupy, not as a replacement for statutory services but as the trusted, accessible delivery model that enables those services to reach the families they are otherwise unable to engage.

The economic case for early investment

The economic evidence is unambiguous. The Nobel laureate James Heckman found a 13 per cent annual rate of return on birth-to-five programmes for disadvantaged children (Heckman, 2006). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) 2025 Sure Start evaluation found that every £1 spent generated £2.05 in long-term benefits. Community-based provision in the early years delivers the highest returns of any stage of education.

13%

annual rate of return on birth-to-five programmes for disadvantaged children (Heckman, 2006)

£2.05

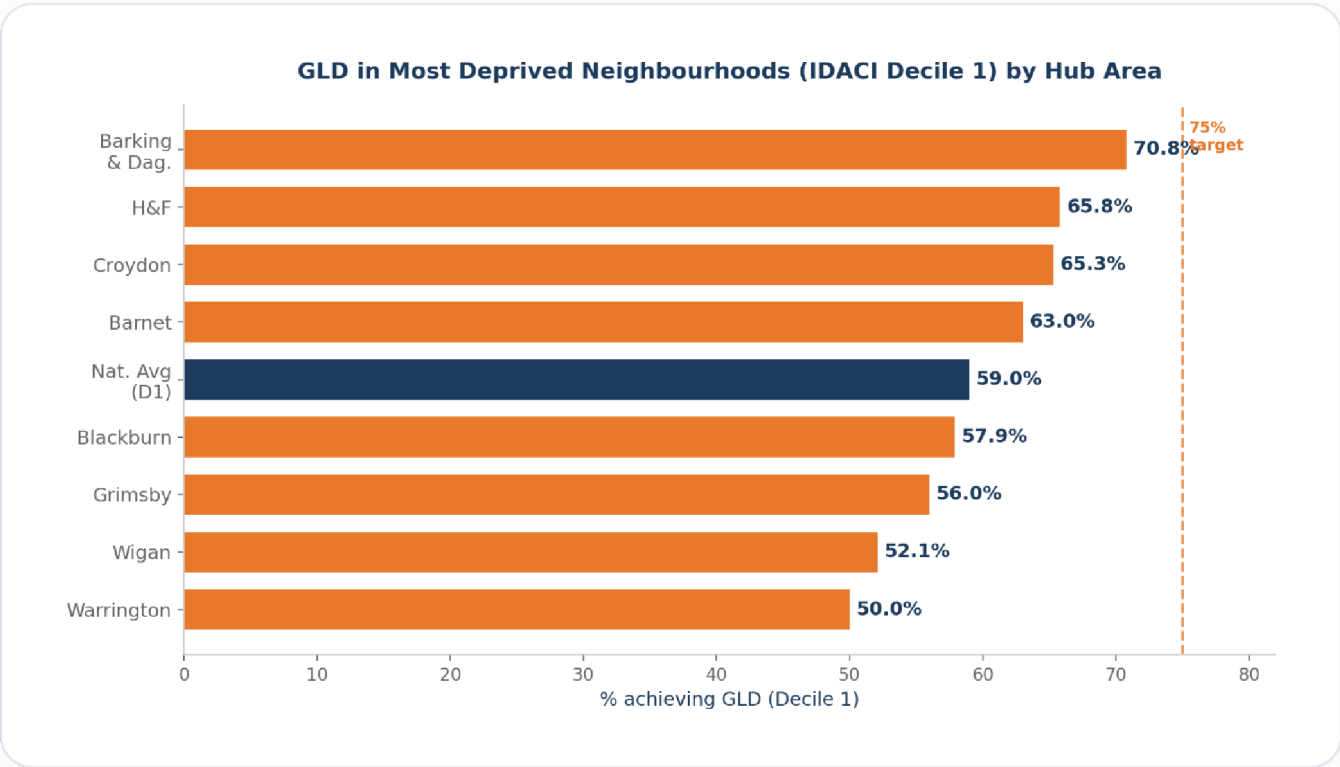
returned for every £1 spent on Sure Start over the long term (IFS, 2025)

OUR APPROACH

Our model is rooted in proportionate universalism: our hubs are open to everyone and no family is ever turned away, because a mix of families is healthy for the community. However, reaching those who need us most does not happen by accident. It requires deliberate, data-informed effort, weighted towards families facing the greatest disadvantage. We track and cross-reference three datasets across every hub, so that we can be confident we are not only located in the right areas but actively reaching the right families within them.

The gap in our communities

Babyzone hubs are placed where the good level of development gap is widest. In every hub area, children in the most deprived neighbourhoods fall well below the national GLD average, and further still below the Government’s 75 per cent target. The chart below shows GLD for children in the most deprived decile (IDACI Decile 1) in each hub location. Every one sits below target, several by more than 20 percentage points.



Every hub area sits below the 75% target for its most deprived children. Source: DfE EYFSP Results 2024/25 (IDACI 2025 update).

This is the deficit that our model is built to address, and the evidence shows that we reach into it rather than around it. Across our eight established English hubs, 74 per cent of family visits come from the 40 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods nationally (IDACI Deciles 1 to 4), and 62.4 per cent from Deciles 1 to 3. We are not merely located near the gap; we are reaching the families on the wrong side of it. How we identify and verify these communities, together with the IMD, IDACI and ACORN method behind both site selection and this reach data, is set out in full in Appendix A.

The following pages examine two of these communities in detail: Preston, a hub opening this autumn, chosen on account of its GLD gap; and Grimsby, where the national picture of white working-class underachievement is acutely visible.

Preston, identified by the gap

Preston is one of the hubs opening this autumn, and it illustrates how we choose our locations. It was identified not in retrospect but before a single session had taken place, on account of how far its children sit from their national peers on a good level of development.

Preston is among the more deprived districts in England. The 2025 Indices of Deprivation rank it 57th of 296 districts and unitary authorities, placing it within the most deprived fifth of the country, and approximately 17 per cent of its neighbourhoods fall within the most deprived tenth nationally, a concentration that district-wide averages tend to mask. Across Lancashire, the good level of development rate stands at 64.8 per cent, below the England average of 67.7 per cent (2023/24), and within the county Preston is one of the districts that reduce that average. Within Preston's own most deprived neighbourhoods the picture is starker still: just 48.7 per cent of children in Decile 1 reach a good level of development, the lowest of any location in our current or pipeline network and a gap of more than 26 percentage points to the 75 per cent target. Decile 2 (57.3 per cent) and Decile 3 (58.1 per cent) also sit well below the national average.

This is the model performing as it is designed to: reading the GLD gap in a community, confirming it against deprivation data, and placing a free, open-access hub where the early years deficit is deepest, before the gap has had the opportunity to compound.

48.7%

Decile 1 GLD in Preston, the lowest in our current or pipeline network.

26pp

the gap to the 75 per cent target for its most disadvantaged children.

57th of 296

Preston's rank on the 2025 Indices of Deprivation, within the most deprived fifth of England.



Preston Youth Zone

Grimsby and the white working class

Grimsby, one of our newer hubs, sits in a community facing some of the most entrenched early years disadvantage in England, and it is central to a national picture that has only recently been made explicit.

In June 2026 the Independent Inquiry into White Working Class Educational Outcomes (commissioned by Star Academies, with research led by Public First) reported that white working-class children are now the lowest-achieving major group in the school system, and that the gap opens in the early years. Only approximately 48 per cent of white working-class children reach a good level of development by five, against approximately 75 per cent of their white British peers who are not eligible for free school meals. It is the widest early gap of any group, and it does not close: just over a third proceed to a standard pass in English and mathematics GCSE, against nearly three-quarters of non-disadvantaged pupils.

The inquiry concludes that this is not a matter of low aspiration or individual failure but a systemic one: early gaps in development, weaker relationships between families and services, a lower sense of belonging, higher absence, and too few credible routes into further study and work. Nor is it inevitable. Where provision is relational, ambitious and accessible, these children achieve as well as their peers.

Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes was one of only three communities the inquiry selected for its community research roundtables, chosen for its large white British majority, high deprivation and low outcomes. The community our hub serves is therefore one that the national inquiry treated as emblematic of the problem. Babyzone's response is the accessible, relational, home-and-hub provision to which the evidence points. Of the families attending the Grimsby hub, 74 per cent fall within our target ACORN categories, and the local gap to the 75 per cent target for the most deprived children is among the steepest in our network.



Grimsby Youth Zone

Underlying data: GLD by IDACI decile

Hub Area	GLD D1	GLD D2	GLD D3	D1 Gap to 75%
National Average	~59%	~64%	~68%	16pp
Barking & Dagenham	70.8%	66.5%	66.6%	4pp
Barnet	63.0%	66.1%	72.3%	12pp
Blackburn	57.9%	61.8%	67.8%	17pp
Croydon	65.3%	63.5%	68.9%	10pp
Hammersmith & Fulham	65.8%	73.3%	68.1%	9pp
Grimsby	56.0%	52.0%	64.0%	19pp
Warrington	50.0%	58.7%	66.4%	25pp
Wigan	52.1%	57.6%	60.0%	23pp

Source: DfE EYFSP Results 2024/25 (IDACI 2025 update). “D1 gap to 75%” shows the distance from the government’s target for a hub’s most deprived children.

These are the gaps that Babyzone’s model is designed to address. The hub spotlights in the appendix show how our data-led approach translates in practice, combining reach, need and early-outcomes evidence for Barking & Dagenham, Barnet and Grimsby.



Note. GLD data relates to the eight established English hubs only (DfE EYFSP 2024/25, IDACI 2025 update). Welsh and Scottish early years outcomes are measured under separate national frameworks.

What happens when families walk through the door

What matters is what happens next: the quality of the experience inside the hub, the programmes that families access, the support they connect with, and whether what they learn travels home.

A typical hub day

Every hub runs on the same principle: a warm, accessible space where families can stay as long as they wish and take up as much or as little as they want. There is no booking system, and we collect only as much data as is required to track targeting and report impact. Doors open at 9:30am to exploratory play zones, soft play, a reading corner, colouring tables and five or six class spaces. Locally hired team members greet families and show them around, and a rolling programme of developmental classes runs until 2:30pm. A family might attend two or three sessions, spend time in free play, eat a warm subsidised meal, talk with other parents, or speak to a partner organisation on site. There is no pressure to follow a schedule: the model is built around how families behave, rather than how institutions would prefer them to.

This flexibility is deliberate. Many families face practical barriers, including managing several children alone, unpredictable routines, transport difficulties and anxiety about new settings, that make appointment-based provision inaccessible. The drop-in model removes each of these obstacles. Families return because the experience is positive, not because they are required to do so.

“

It feels like it's therapy for parents. The kids are safe and happy, and you can just...breathe.

Parent — Babyzone hub



Programmes that target every area of development

Inside every hub, families access a blend of Babyzone-developed programmes and commissioned, evidence-informed classes, together covering all five areas of learning assessed for a Good Level of Development.

The programming is anchored in a clear theory of change: too many families facing the greatest disadvantage cannot access the early experiences that shape a child's life. By providing free, high-quality classes and building parental confidence, measured through the Parent Confidence Index, we strengthen the home learning environment where the evidence shows child development outcomes are most powerfully shaped. Practice creates knowledge, knowledge creates confidence, and confident parents create the conditions in which children thrive.

	Communication & language	Mathematics	Personal, social & emotional development	Physical development	Literacy
BABYZONE PROGRAMMES					
Everyday Maths (Stanford DREME)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
NEST	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
External programmes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Together, Babyzone and commissioned external programmes cover all five GLD areas of learning with no gaps.

We develop our own programmes where we identify gaps in existing provision and where parents tell us they want more support, particularly around school readiness and daily routines.

Programmes we developed ourselves

Everyday Maths

Developed with Stanford DREME

Early mathematics at five is the strongest predictor of later academic achievement. Everyday Maths was developed with Stanford University's DREME Network, and its approach is informed by guidance from the Early Childhood Mathematics Group (ECMG), the UK's leading network of early years maths experts and researchers. Everyday Maths makes mathematics visible in everyday routines: counting stairs, sorting toys, and spotting patterns. It targets the Mathematics Early Learning Goals (Number and Numerical Patterns), with structured sessions together with take-home activities and digital content to reinforce learning between hub visits.

NEST

Name, Empathise, Self-Regulate, Team Up

Nest is our social and emotional learning programme for children aged 2 to 5 and their parents. Shaped by parents who identified demand for practical tools around strong emotions and calming strategies, it builds skills through short, playful sessions. Nest draws on source material published by The Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood, including their Shaping Us framework on the social and emotional skills that matter most. It is also grounded in neuroscience from Harvard's Centre on the Developing Child, and research on caregiver responsiveness and play from Fonagy, Ramchandani, and colleagues.



Commissioned evidence-informed classes

Babyzone commissions a diverse range of engaging, creative and developmentally rich classes, delivered in our hubs by trained external practitioners. A typical programme includes:



- **Sensory & discovery** (Baby Sensory, Toddler Sense): multi-sensory exploration that stimulates early brain development and strengthens the parent-child bond.
- **Language & storytelling** (Reading Fairy, Music House for Children): communication, early literacy and a love of stories and rhyme.
- **Physical development & movement** (Little Kickers, Baby Yoga, Hip Hop Dance): gross motor skills, coordination and physical confidence.
- **Bonding & wellbeing** (Baby Massage, Post-natal Pilates): deepening attachment, supporting parental mental health and responsive caregiving.
- **Curiosity & STEM** (Mini Professors, Dinky Medics, Mini First Aid): early scientific thinking through hands-on experiments.

These are the kinds of high-quality classes for which more affluent families routinely pay, typically **£8 to £15 per 45-minute session**, with fixed start times, block-booking requirements and no provision for a second carer to attend. Babyzone makes them **free, flexible and accessible** to the families who need them most.

“

We started going to Reading Fairy because a Babyzone staff member said it was good for making reading fun. Now J is saying the first sounds in words, asking me to read him books at home and making up his own stories.

J's mother — Babyzone Hammersmith & Fulham

The home learning environment and digital bridge

Closing the good level of development gap does not occur in five or six hub visits over a term. It occurs in the hundreds of small moments in between: counting stairs, naming feelings and sharing a book at bedtime. The strongest single predictor of a child’s development at four and a half is not the setting a child attends but the home learning environment. The purpose of everything we do in the hub is therefore to change what happens outside it, sending parents home with the confidence and practical knowledge to continue building the same skills that the Early Years Foundation Stage measures. Our digital tools exist to hold that loop together between visits, reinforcing classes, answering questions at 2am and keeping isolated families connected.

16k
monthly users

Baby Buddy

Our digital companion app, offering evidence-based content from pregnancy to age five, with more than 5 million pieces consumed in 2025. It fills the gap on the six days between hub visits, reinforcing classes and answering questions at 2am.

6,000+
parents

WhatsApp communities

This connects parents to their local hub team and to one another, providing schedules, practical advice, partner services and peer relationships. For isolated families, it is often their primary social connection.

Academy

Babyzone Academy

Evidence-informed training and resources for early years practitioners, so that approaches such as Everyday Maths and NEST are delivered consistently across a growing network beyond our own hubs.

SEND support: a dimension we are strengthening

Nationally, 20.6 per cent of children with SEND achieve GLD, one of the two strongest predictors of not reaching the standard. Our open-access, barrier-free model removes many obstacles these families face, requiring no referrals, fixed schedules or formal assessments, and supports early identification through on-site speech and language therapy partners and signposting into support such as Portage. Adapting the wider programme systematically for SEND, and improving the representation of this population in our reach data, is an area we are working to strengthen as the network grows.



Learning that travels home: a shared reading moment at the hub.

Evidence of behaviour change

Our parent surveys, designed with NPC (New Philanthropy Capital), confirm that what happens in hubs translates into changed behaviour at home.

91%

Report improved parenting confidence

88%

Take Babyzone learning home

95%

Rate classes positive for development

83%

Build community connections

These findings align with the growing evidence on the home learning environment. The Centre for Young Lives concluded that it is “a stronger and more consistent predictor of children’s development at age four and a half than any aspect of their early education and care experience.” Our model is designed around this finding: the programmes, classes and digital tools are not ends in themselves but the means of equipping parents with the confidence and practical knowledge to support development at home, each day.

The **88%** of parents who take Babyzone learning home represent the mechanism through which hub-based provision becomes sustained developmental benefit.



A backbone for local services

Babyzone's role extends well beyond delivering classes. Each hub functions as a backbone convener, bringing the statutory, voluntary and community organisations families need under one roof, in a space that feels safe and stigma-free. Across the network we work with **over 300 partner organisations**, typically health visitors, infant feeding teams, mental health services, vaccination clinics, housing support, employment and benefits advice, baby banks and specialist charities. Regular partners attend weekly or fortnightly, and quarterly community events enable families to access several services in a single visit rather than being passed between waiting lists.

Blackburn

In April 2026 the NHS North West Coast Clinical Networks chose **Babyzone Blackburn** as a venue for the family engagement underpinning their review of the regional Parent Infant and Early Years Relationships Pathway, citing the open-access, inclusive environment and the high volume of families attending. Their team spoke with **around 40 families over a single five-hour session**. Where a statutory review needs to reach families at scale, it comes to Babyzone.

Grimsby

A parent received infant feeding support, an urgent GP referral and a fast-track housing application, **all on the same day**. These outcomes do not happen when services operate in isolation.

Barnet

The hub serves a concentration of refugee families in temporary hotel accommodation, who often have nothing beyond a hotel room. Partners such as **Happy Baby Community** provide Healthy Start supplements on site, and the food pantry has become part of families' weekly shopping. For many, Babyzone is their first connection to the wider support system.



NHS oral health promotion team on site at a Babyzone hub.

The convening effect

Partners benefit from connecting not only with families but with each other. Health visitors meet housing officers; infant feeding teams connect with mental health services. The hub creates referral pathways and collaboration that would not otherwise exist. As one Family Hub lead put it, Babyzone provides the trusted space that statutory services need but cannot create on their own.

This is supported by national evidence. The Centre for Young Lives found that local authorities attribute improvement in early years outcomes not to individual programmes but to integrated ways of working that draw services together around families. In Blackpool, sustained investment in a convening-model approach through A Better Start produced a marked improvement in the proportion of children reaching expected development levels.

+7.5_{pp}

improvement in Blackpool through a convening-model approach (A Better Start)

+4.4_{pp}

national improvement over the same period

Babyzone's model operates on the same principle: the hub is the platform on which services converge, not merely the venue where classes are delivered (Centre for Young Lives, *Starting Well*, June 2026).



Delivering at a fraction of the cost

£130k

per hub, per year

£213

per family, per year

£8

per visit

These are the unit costs of the Babyzone model, and they sit well below those of statutory alternatives. Because Blenheim Chalcot underwrites the organisation's central functions, all philanthropic funding flows directly to supporting families rather than to overheads.

The wider context makes that efficiency more significant. At its peak, Sure Start spending reached £2.7 billion a year; current spending on Family Hubs and Start for Life is less than £600 million, and more than 1,000 children's centres have closed since 2009. Between 2009/10 and 2023/24, local authority spending on preventative services fell by **78.6 per cent in real terms**, and almost half of local authorities expect further reductions (Centre for Young Lives, April 2025). The infrastructure that once delivered strong long-term returns has therefore largely disappeared.

The Government's Best Start in Life strategy and the rollout of Best Start Family Hubs are now beginning to rebuild that infrastructure, informed by the evidence set out above. Independent, community-embedded provision has a distinct part to play alongside it. It is not a substitute for statutory services, but the trusted and accessible setting through which those services are able to reach the families they would otherwise struggle to engage.

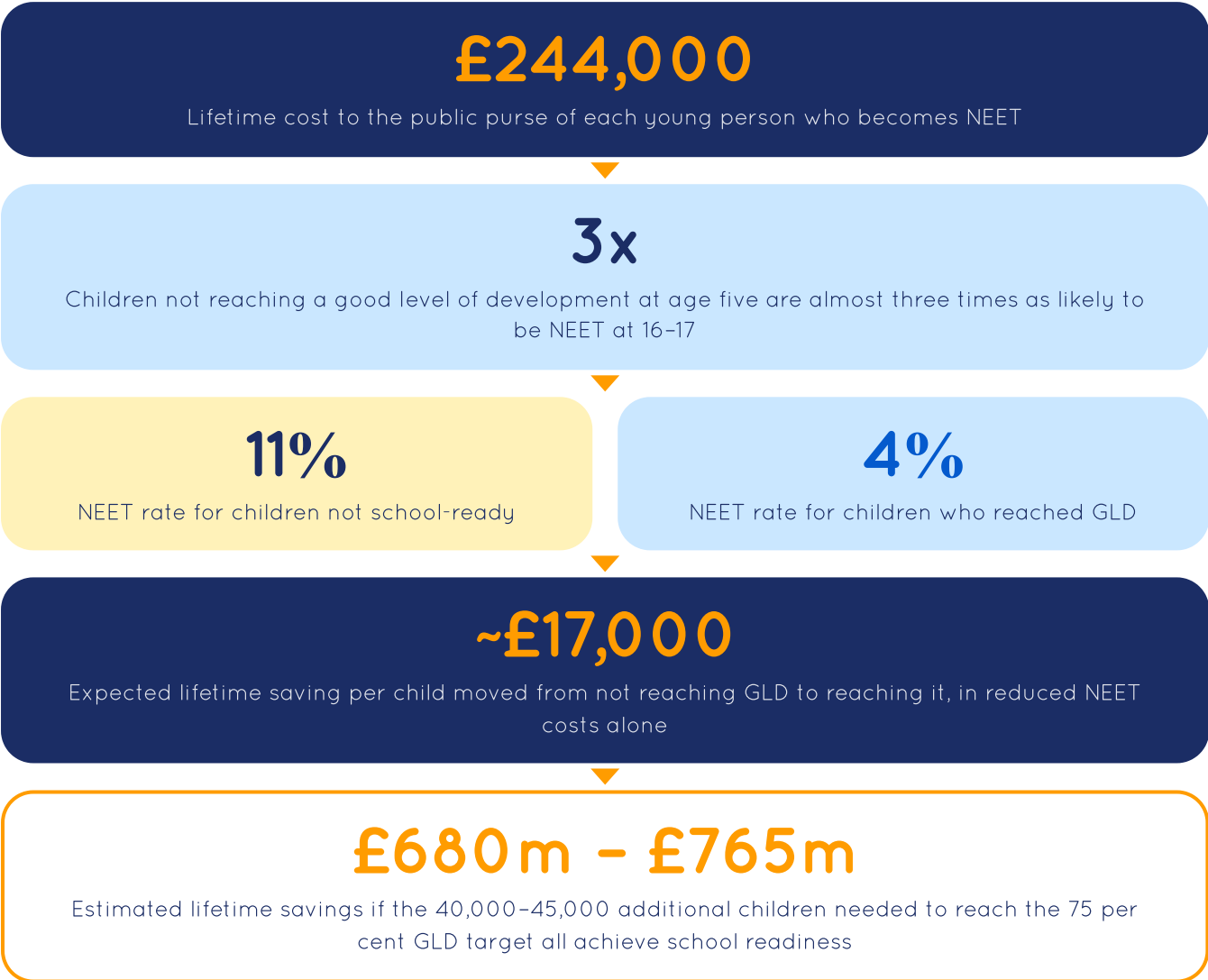
This is the role that Babyzone performs: hosting health visitors, infant feeding teams and Family Hub services within spaces that families already trust, and thereby **extending the reach of the system the country is now rebuilding.**

The economic case extends beyond the immediate cost of provision. The evidence on what happens to children who do not reach school readiness, and the lifetime public costs that follow, is set out overleaf.

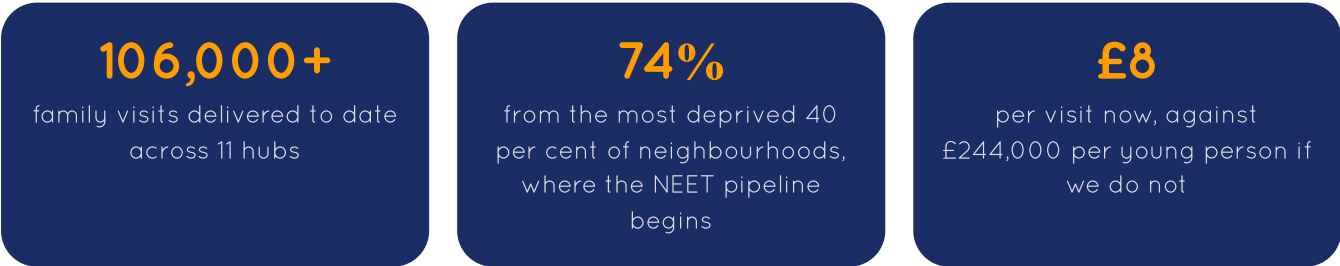
The cost of not being school-ready

Why closing the gap in a good level of development is an investment rather than a cost.

THE EVIDENCE



WHERE BABYZONE FITS



The families Babyzone reaches are in the neighbourhoods where the NEET pipeline begins: where GLD is lowest, deprivation is deepest, and the return on early intervention is highest.

Sources: Warburton et al., BMC Public Health (2024), Connected Bradford (n=8,118); Impetus, Young People and Work: Cost-Benefit Model (June 2026); UCL CEPEO (October 2025); Babyzone IDACI data (August 2025 – June 2026).

The first years last forever

The evidence and the economics are both clear.

The Government has set a 75 per cent GLD target, and the research is unambiguous: high-quality, evidence-based provision in the most deprived communities delivers the highest returns. This is what Babyzone provides. Its data demonstrate that it reaches the right families, its programmes address every GLD domain, and its cost model is both sustainable and scalable.



OUR 2028 GOAL

20 hubs

trusted community anchors in the areas where child poverty is most concentrated

140,000

family visits a year, three quarters from the most deprived 40 per cent of neighbourhoods

If you are interested in backing Babyzone, we would welcome a conversation.

Please contact us to become involved.

hello@babyzone.org.uk

Sources

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How we target

The main briefing sets out the good level of development gap in our communities and what we do to close it. This appendix explains the method behind that work: how we choose where to open, and how we demonstrate, week by week, that we are reaching the families that the 75 per cent target is least likely to reach on its own.

We triangulate three datasets. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measures deprivation at neighbourhood level across seven domains. The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) narrows that to the concentration of children in income-deprived households. ACORN classifies deprivation at postcode, effectively street, level, capturing the pockets of need that neighbourhood averages conceal. Together they enable us to target need before a hub opens and to verify reach after it does.

The pages that follow set out that method in full: the three-tier approach of data-driven site selection, community-led design and accessible-by-design delivery; the closing-the-loop verification cycle; and the reach and concentration data across our established hubs.

How we identify and verify need

Babyzone uses three complementary datasets to ensure that every hub reaches families facing the greatest disadvantage, identifying need at national, neighbourhood and street level. We now operate 11 hubs across England, Wales and Scotland. The deprivation and GLD data in this document relate to our eight established English hubs, where the IDACI, IMD and ACORN frameworks apply. In Wales we use the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) and in Scotland the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to apply the same targeting principles; data from the three 2026 hubs (Swansea, Glasgow and Chorley) will be incorporated as it matures.

IMD

Neighbourhood · multi-domain deprivation

IDACI

Neighbourhood · child income deprivation

ACORN

Street · postcode-level profile

IMD: Index of Multiple Deprivation

IMD measures deprivation across seven domains (income, employment, education, health, crime, housing barriers and living environment), published for Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) of approximately 1,500 people. England's 32,844 LSOAs are each ranked from most to least deprived. Our IMD data show the following:

2 in 3 families live in areas of severe income deprivation

Over half face housing barriers

Almost half face high unemployment

Almost half live in high-crime environments

Two further perspectives on the same question

IDACI: Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index

IDACI ranks every LSOA in England by the proportion of children living in income-deprived households, from Decile 1 (most deprived) to Decile 10 (least deprived). We cross-reference every family's postcode against IDACI data to verify that our hubs reach the communities where child poverty is most concentrated.

It is particularly effective in dense urban areas, where small boundaries closely reflect lived experience. In semi-rural or coastal settings, LSOA boundaries can span large areas of mixed affluence, diluting the picture for families in deprived pockets, which is why we supplement IDACI with IMD and ACORN in those locations.

ACORN: geodemographic classification

ACORN classifies every UK postcode into demographic categories using household characteristics, consumer behaviour and census data, a far more granular level than LSOA-based measures. Where LSOA data groups approximately 1,500 people together, ACORN can distinguish individual streets within the same small area.

We use it for two purposes. First, **pre-engagement targeting**: identifying the specific streets, bus routes, shops and nurseries where our intended families live, and the digital channels they use most. Second, **post-engagement verification**: confirming that attending families match the demographic profile we set out to reach. ACORN is especially effective where LSOA-level data is too broad to capture pockets of deprivation, such as affluent boroughs with isolated estates, or dispersed rural poverty.



A deliberate, three-tier approach

1

Data-driven site selection and outreach

Before a hub opens, IDACI, IMD and ACORN data identify locations with the highest concentrations of children in the most deprived deciles. ACORN's postcode-level data then drives outreach:

- **Targeted awareness:** social media directed at specific demographic segments, rather than broad borough-wide campaigns.
- **Hyper-local presence:** posters at specific supermarkets, bus routes and community locations, and leaflets posted directly to target households.
- **Partnership outreach**, in which local teams work with as many organisations as possible: nurseries, schools, libraries, food banks, health visitors and other children's centres.

2

Community-led design

Data indicate where the need lies; communities shape the form of the response. Before each hub opens we consult local families and partner organisations, both statutory services (health visitors, infant feeding teams) and voluntary sector groups, to establish what provision already exists, where gaps remain, and what families identify as their priorities. This directly informs location, timing, programming and staffing.

In **Grimsby**, consultation with Family Hub partners identified Friday as the day with no existing early years provision, and the hub's offer was built around that gap. In **Glasgow** and **Chorley**, pre-launch engagement through community conversations and parent WhatsApp groups shaped hub design ahead of opening.

3

Accessible by design

The lesson of Sure Start is clear: the families who stand to benefit most are often the hardest to reach through traditional services. Each hub is therefore free and drop-in, and requires no referral or appointment. Hubs sit on accessible high streets within walking distance of target postcodes, are staffed by locally hired team members representative of the communities they serve, and are hosted in existing high-quality venues.

CLOSING THE LOOP

As families attend, we cross-reference their postcodes against all three datasets to verify that targeting is working. This is reported **weekly** and reviewed against strategic targets. Where the data show scope to strengthen reach, outreach is adjusted accordingly.

Target



Engage



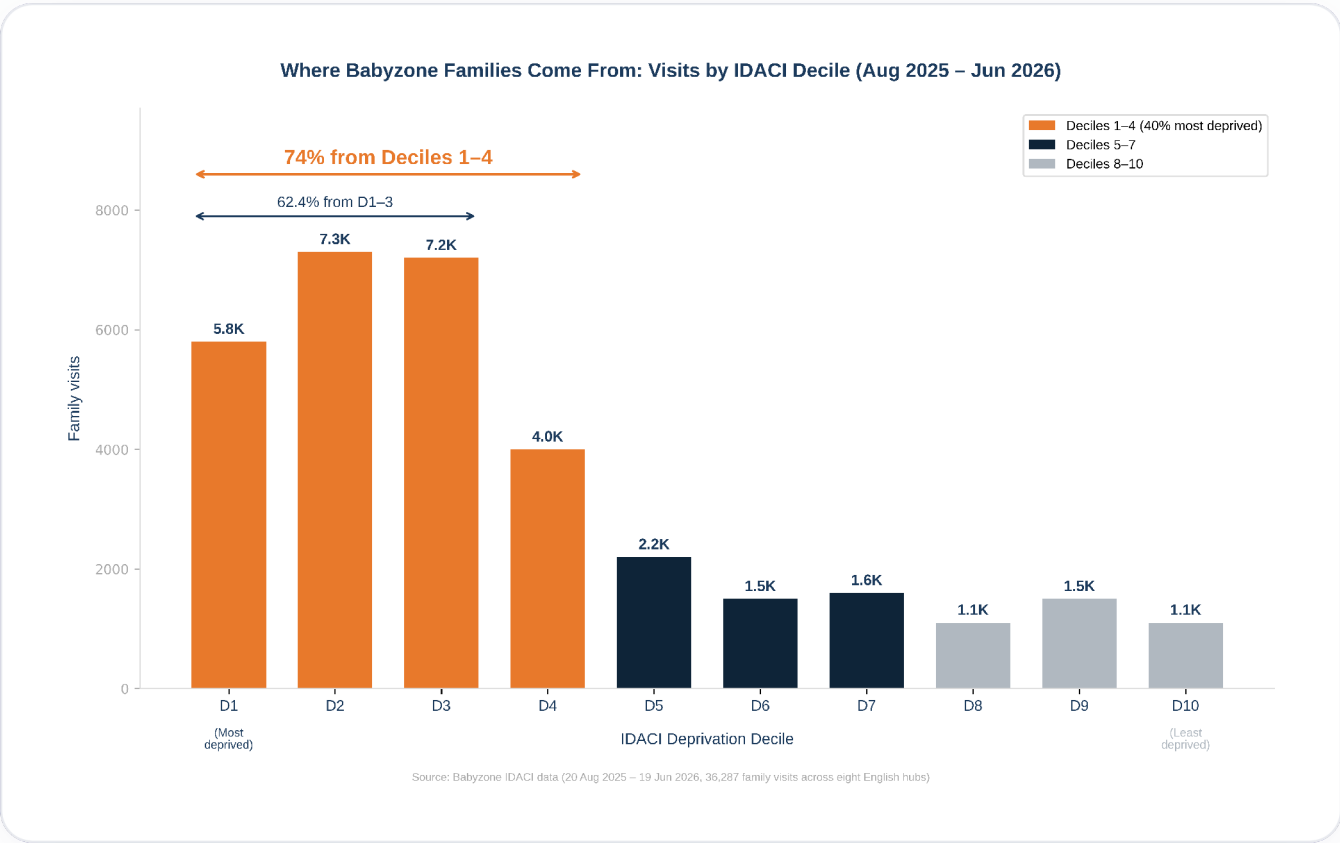
Verify



Adjust

The targeting is translating into reach

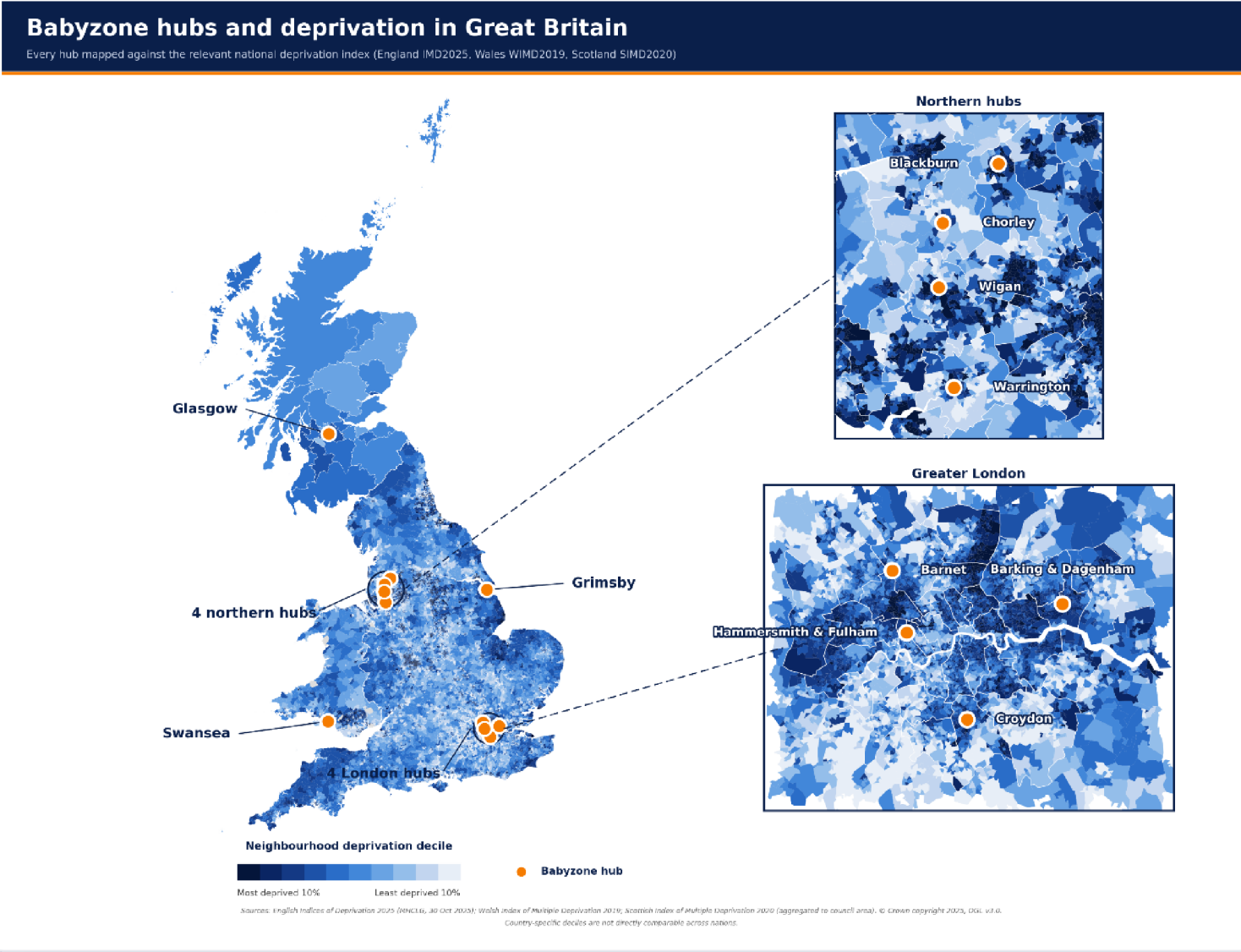
Across our eight established English hubs, the distribution of family visits by IDACI decile shows consistent reach into the 40 per cent most deprived communities nationally. Between 20 August 2025 and 19 June 2026, **74 per cent of all 36,287 family visits** came from IDACI Deciles 1 to 4, with **62.4 per cent from Deciles 1 to 3 alone**. This ranges from 92.3 per cent in Barking & Dagenham, our longest-running hub, to lower figures in areas where deprivation is dispersed across a borough rather than concentrated in a small number of wards. In these locations, LSOA-level IDACI data can understate the need of the families we serve. This is why we use multiple datasets: where IDACI reach appears lower, ACORN postcode classification consistently confirms that hubs are reaching families within our target geodemographic categories. In every case, the triangulation of all three datasets provides a more complete picture than any single measure alone. These visits were made by **17,870 unique families**, demonstrating the scale of Babyzone's reach across communities, which will continue to grow as we open new hubs across the UK.



Family visits concentrate in the most deprived deciles. Source: Babyzone IDACI data (Aug 2025 to Jun 2026); 36,287 family visits across eight English hubs.

From Grimsby to Glasgow: 11 communities and growing

Our hubs now operate in 11 communities across England, Wales and Scotland, each placed against the relevant national deprivation index. The reach and outcomes data in this briefing relate to the eight established English hubs, where the IDACI framework applies.



Darker shading indicates greater deprivation. Country-specific deciles are not directly comparable across nations.

Hub spotlights

These profiles show the model at work in three established hubs, combining reach data, local deprivation context and early-outcomes evidence at the level of a single community.

Barking and Dagenham, our longest-running hub, illustrates the model at maturity. Barnet demonstrates why no single deprivation measure is sufficient, since a borough-wide average conceals estates of real need beside considerable affluence. Grimsby shows the model's reach into one of the most entrenched white working-class communities in England. Each profile is a fuller, deprivation-led companion to the GLD-focused treatment in the main briefing.

Barking & Dagenham

The model at maturity, and our highest reach figure in the network.

Barnet

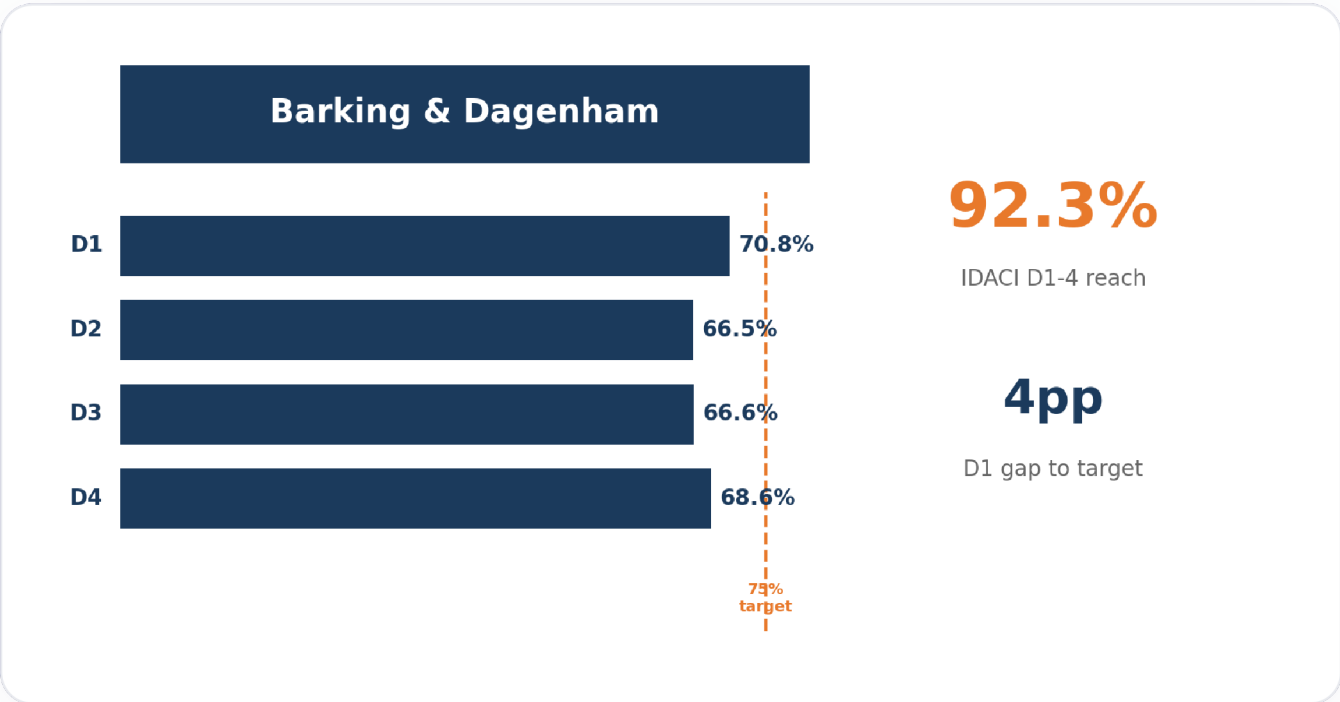
Why no single deprivation measure is sufficient, where affluence and real need sit side by side.

Grimsby

Reach into one of the most entrenched white working-class communities in England.

Barking & Dagenham

These profiles show how the model translates at hub level, combining reach data, local deprivation context and early-outcomes evidence.



Family visits from IDACI Deciles 1 to 4, Decile 1 to 4 GLD attainment, and the Decile 1 gap to the 75 per cent target. Source: Babyzone IDACI data (Aug 2025 to Jun 2026); DfE EYFSP 2024/25.

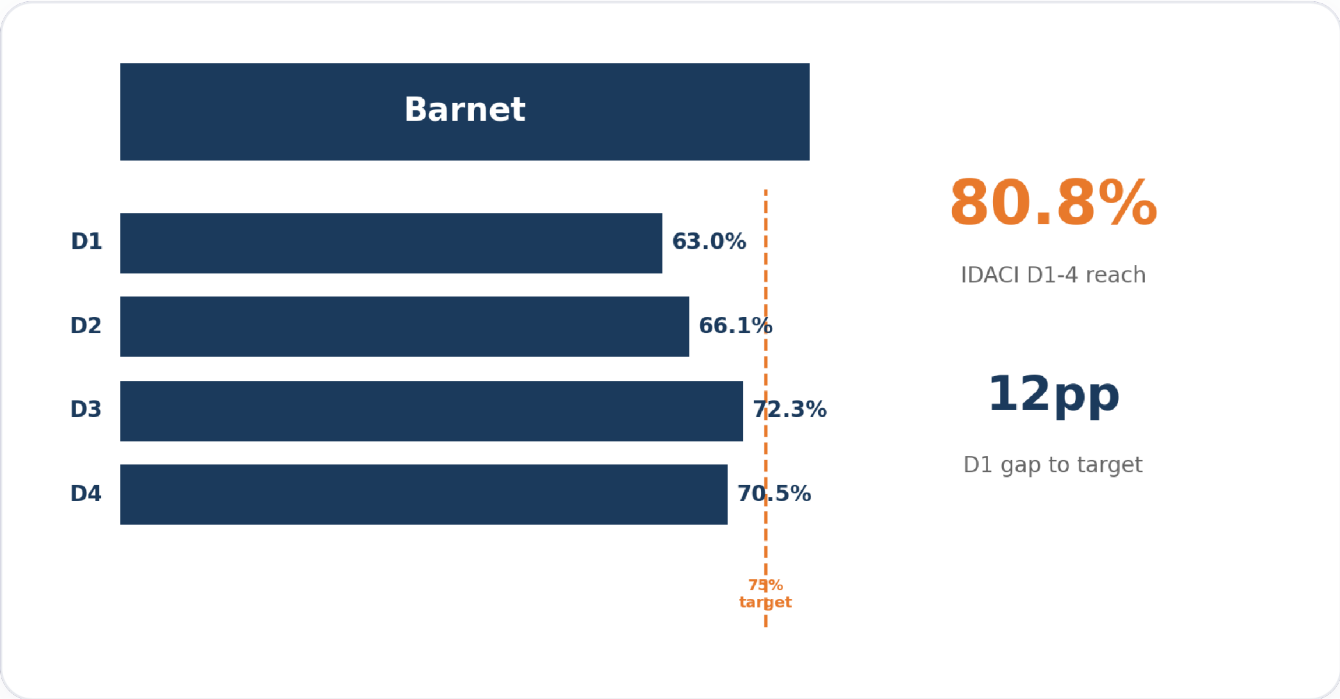
Established for six years, Barking & Dagenham is our longest-running hub, with **92.3% of families from IDACI Deciles 1 to 4**. The borough ranks 9th most deprived in England and among the top three in London; 30.4 per cent of residents are under 18, the highest proportion of any London borough, and 26,600 children under 16 live in poverty after housing costs. Decile 1 GLD in the wards we serve is **70.8%**, 4.2 points short of the 75 per cent target. The hub hosts co-located health visitors, infant feeding teams and Family Hub services, and was the venue for the March 2026 joint visit by then Minister Olivia Bailey MP and Children’s Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza.





Babyzone

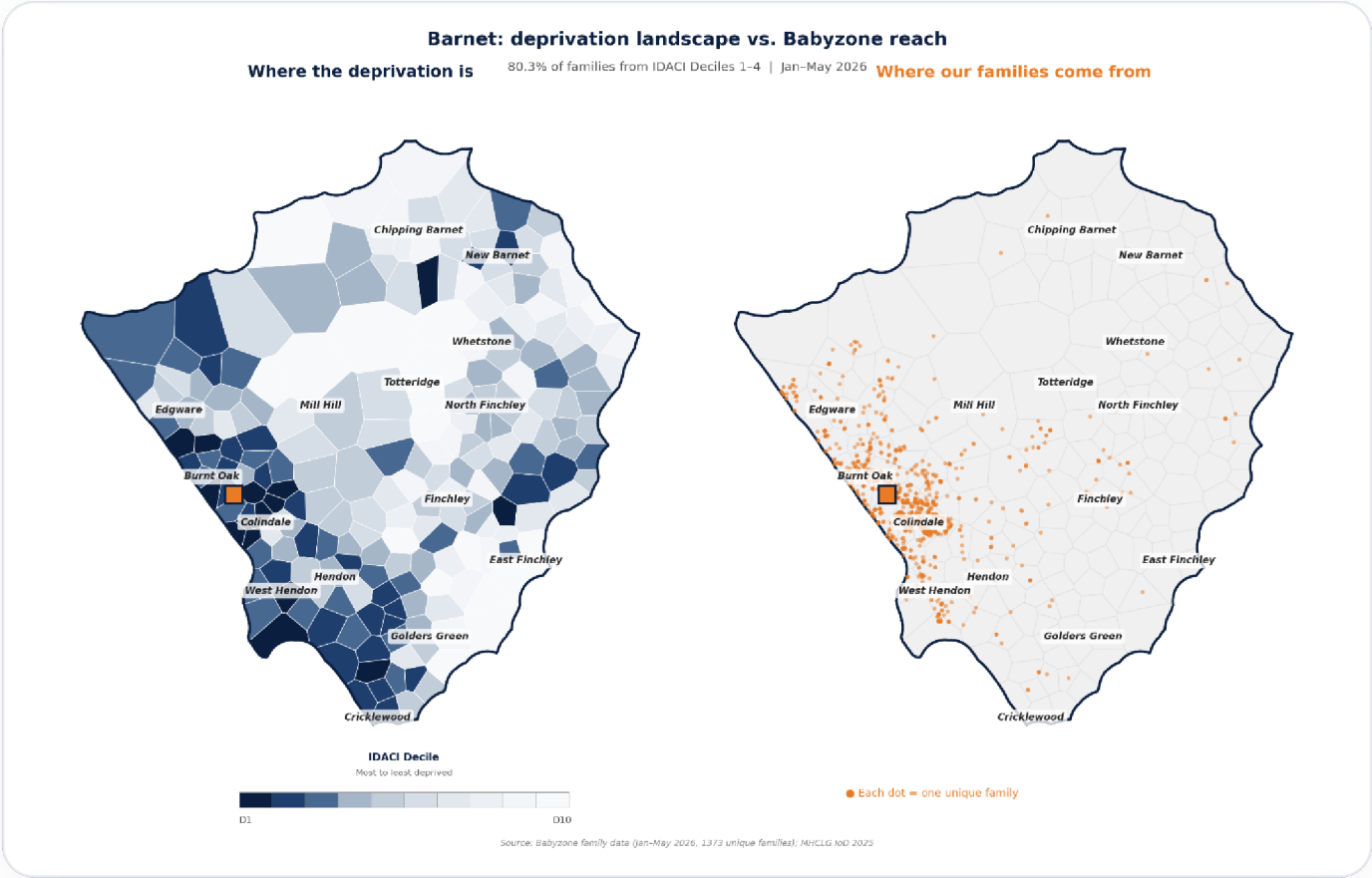
Barnet



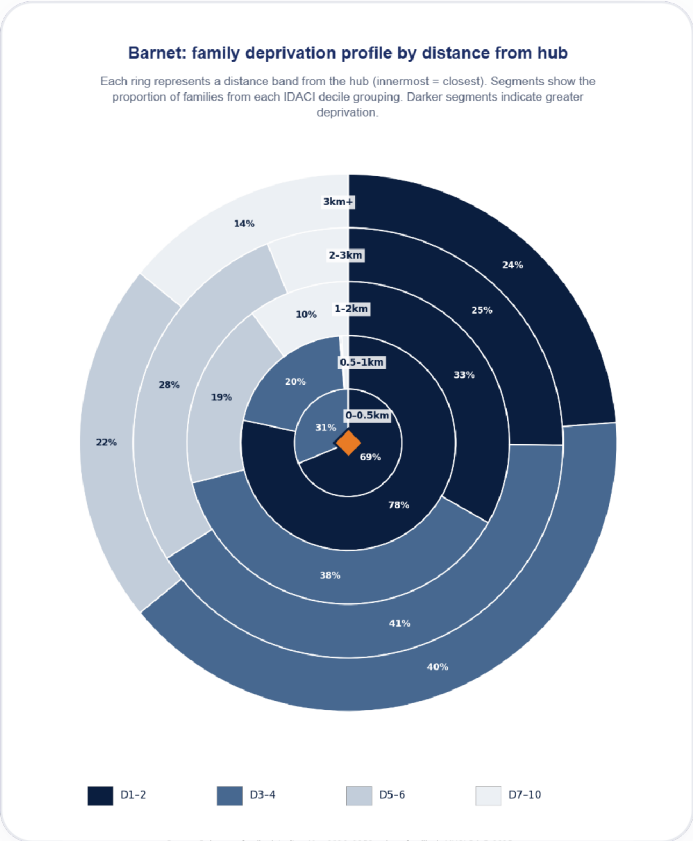
Family visits from IDACI Deciles 1 to 4, Decile 1 to 4 GLD attainment, and the Decile 1 gap to the 75 per cent target. Source: Babyzone IDACI data (Aug 2025 to Jun 2026); DfE EYFSP 2024/25.

We profile Barnet because it shows why no single deprivation measure is sufficient. **80.8% of families are from IDACI Deciles 1 to 4**, yet borough-wide averages mask stark inequality: on IoD25, Barnet ranks 140th of 296 local authorities, having dropped 55 places, one of the starkest deteriorations in London. Concentrated deprivation in wards such as Burnt Oak (83 per cent of residents in the top 30 per cent most deprived nationally) and Colindale North (78 per cent, home to the only Barnet LSOA in the most deprived 10 per cent in England) sits directly beside some of North London’s most affluent neighbourhoods. GLD for Decile 1 children is **63.0%**, twelve points below target. ACORN, operating at postcode rather than LSOA level, shows that 77 per cent of attending families fall within our target categories, a level of granularity that matters where a single LSOA can span from Golders Green to East Finchley.

Deprivation landscape compared with our reach



Deprivation by LSOA (left) and the residential location of each unique family (right). Each orange dot is one family. Source: Babyzone family data (Jan to May 2026); MHCLG IoD 2025.



Source: Babyzone family data (Jan to May 2026); MHCLG IoD 2025.

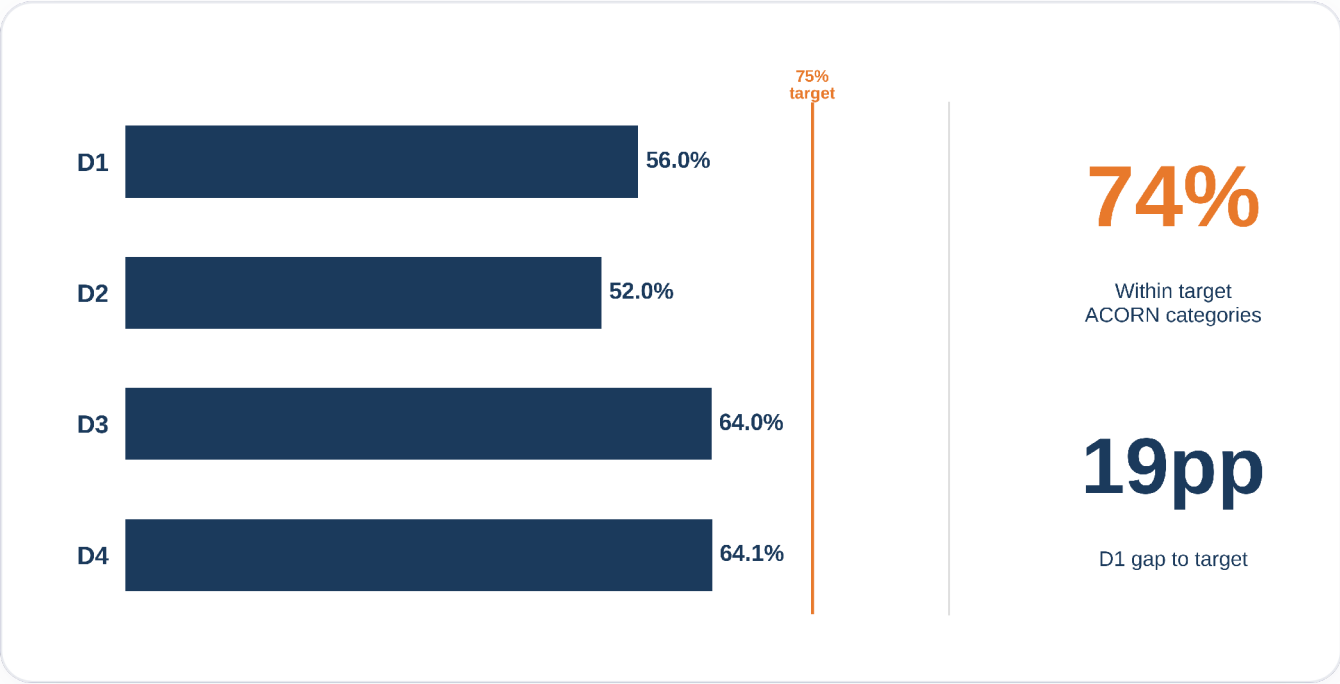
77%

of attending families fall within our target ACORN categories, confirming reach into pockets of deprivation that borough-level data would conceal.

55 places

dropped on the national deprivation index since the previous measure, one of the starkest deteriorations in London.

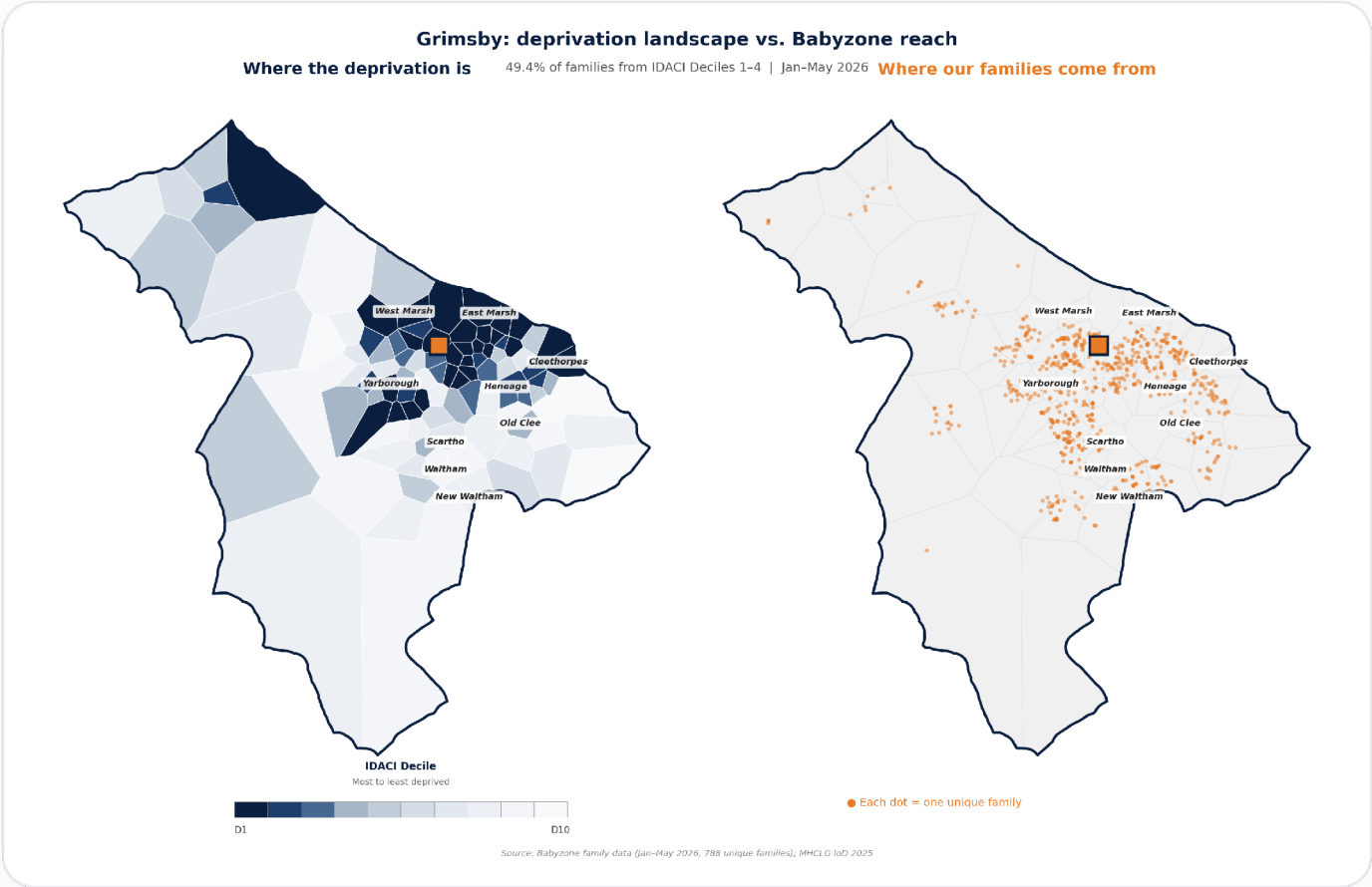
Grimsby



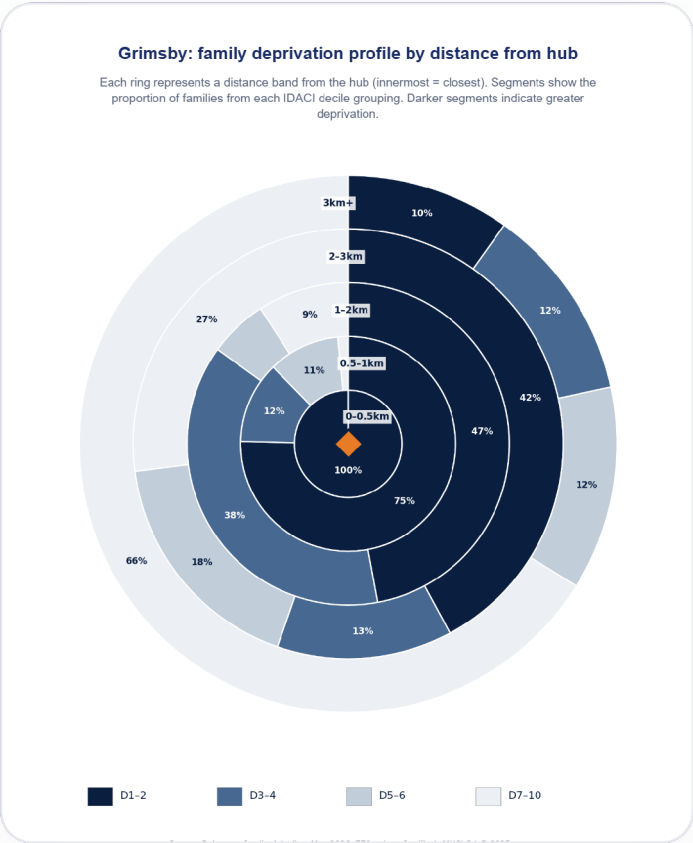
Proportion of family visits within target ACORN geodemographic categories, Decile 1 to 4 GLD attainment, and the gap between local Decile 1 GLD and the Government’s 75 per cent target. Source: Babyzone ACORN data (Aug 2025 to Jun 2026); DfE EYFSP 2024/25.

Grimsby is one of our newest hubs, having opened in early 2026, and is establishing itself in a community facing some of the most entrenched disadvantage in England. The Independent Inquiry into White Working Class Educational Outcomes (Public First, June 2026) found that white working-class underachievement reflects not low aspiration but systemic challenges rooted in early gaps in educational development, weaker relationships between families and services, and limited access to opportunity. In Grimsby, where the population is predominantly white working-class and deprivation is severe, these patterns are acutely visible. **74 per cent of families attending the hub fall within our target ACORN geodemographic categories** (Babyzone ACORN data, Aug 2025 to Jun 2026).

Deprivation landscape compared with our reach



Deprivation by LSOA (left) and the residential location of each unique family (right). Each orange dot is one family. Source: Babyzone family data (Jan to May 2026); MHCLG IoD 2025.



Source: Babyzone family data (Jan to May 2026); MHCLG IoD 2025.

74%
of families from target ACORN categories, including visits from Hard-Up Households and Cash-Strapped Families.

19pp
gap to the 75 per cent target for the most deprived children, among the steepest in our network.

100%
of the closest families (0 to 0.5km) are from Deciles 1 to 2; reach is deepest where deprivation is highest.

The first years last forever
The first years last forever
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We aim to open **20 early years hubs** across the UK
by 2028, in the communities that need them most.

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