

# Fairer Start Local Leeds



Working together  
so that all children  
have a stronger  
start and a  
brighter future



December 2021

nesta



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# Introduction

## Fairer Start Local Leeds

**Not every baby, toddler or young child gets what they need to thrive. Fairer Start Local is a collaborative programme of work between Nesta and three local authority partners – Stockport, Leeds and York. Fairer Start Local brings together our local authority partners' deep knowledge and ideas – about their services, families, children and communities – with Nesta's capabilities and experience of service innovation and improvement.**

This report summarises our learning from an initial phase of work, where we ran 16-week rapid discovery projects to explore how innovation could help to transform early years services in each area. The aim of these projects was to produce actionable insights about how to improve support for families in the early years (from conception to age five). In addition, it was an opportunity for the

local areas and Nesta to experience working together, to explore whether there was fertile ground for a longer-term partnership.

Following this discovery phase, we will embark on a three to five-year-long innovation partnership. Working together, Nesta and our local authority partners will use evidence-based design, data science

and behavioural insights to develop new ways to make sure that all babies, toddlers and young children have a fair start in life. We will focus on using innovation to uncover new ways of supporting stable and secure family relationships, boosting the mental and physical health of families, increasing access to high-quality childcare, and alleviating the impact of child poverty.

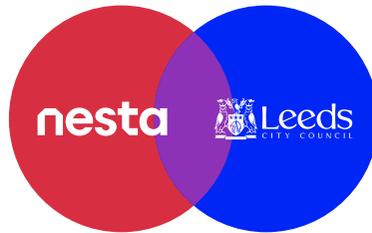


# The process

Work together in partnership to test out ideas and potential for long-term partnership

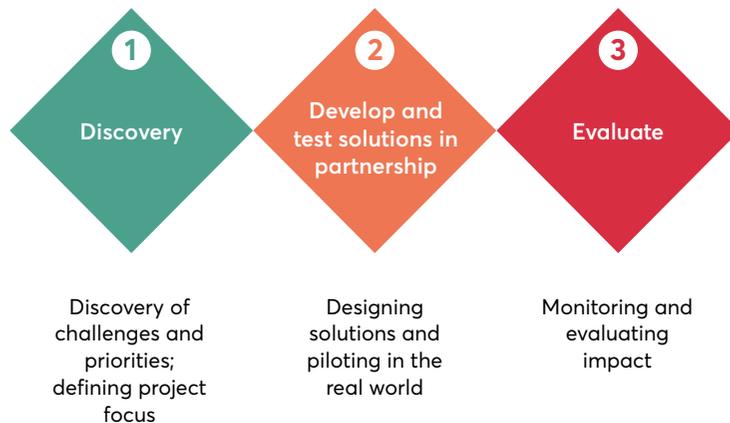
## Partnership

Multi-disciplinary team; structured innovation methods; ideas, expertise and networks



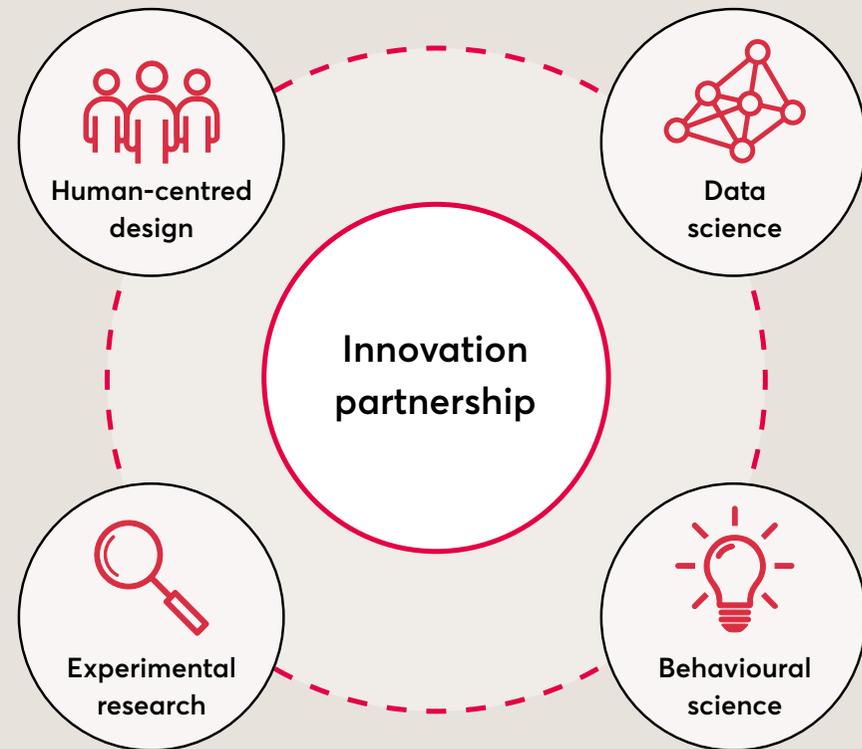
Deep understanding of local context; priorities for improvement; local convening power; ambition to redesign services over the long term; capability and drive to innovate locally

## Prototype innovative solutions



## Using innovation methods to produce actionable insights

### Innovation methods within our multi-disciplinary team



# Identifying a project focus in Leeds

## Ambitions and objectives in Leeds

- > Leeds City Council's Best Council Plan.
- > Child Friendly City 3: to be the best city for children and young people to grow up in.
- > Reducing current inequalities in health and developmental outcomes.
- > Best Start strategy: give every child in Leeds the best start.
- > Engaging with all communities to develop trust.
- > Leeds 3 As strategy: attend, attain and achieve.
- > Future in Mind strategy: focus on mental health and wellbeing for 0-25 year olds.
- > CCG's five year plan, Leftshift Blueprint.

## Leeds City Council's organisational values

- > Outcomes focused.
- > Working as a team for Leeds.
- > Being open honest and trusted.
- > Child and family centred.
- > Working restoratively with families and partners.
- > Family is the most underutilised resource of the 21st century.
- > Voice and influence.
- > Commitment to collaborative working.

## Background to the project

- > The project was designed as a rapid discovery project to be designed and delivered in partnership between Nesta and Leeds, and produce actionable insights within 16 weeks.
- > We held two large workshops in April 2021 bringing together stakeholders from across Leeds to input to decision making on a shared identity for this work.
- > We produced this hypothesis:

**If we could better understand who is and who isn't accessing services, we could listen to those families and learn how to better meet their needs and improve children's speech, language and communication outcomes**

# Project overview

## What we did

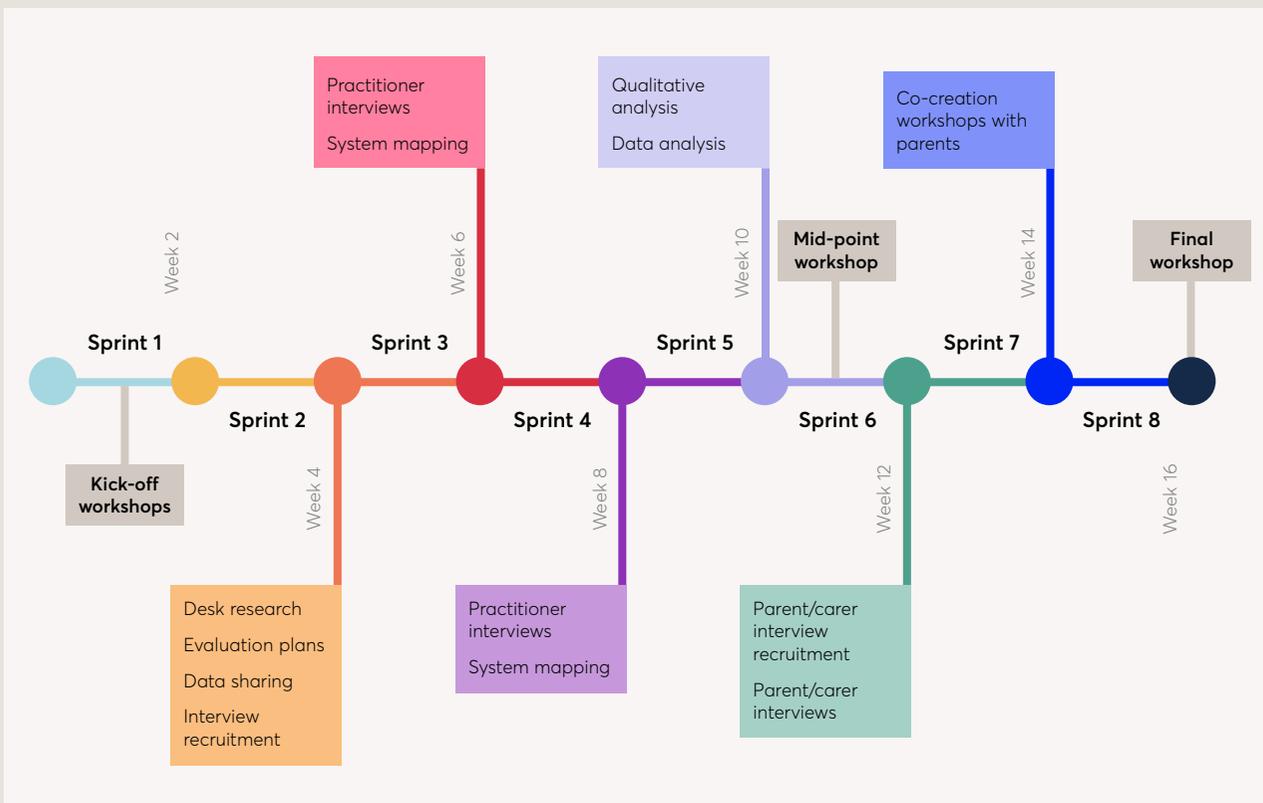
Key activities in this project included:

1. Interviewing a range of practitioners who support families and children aged 0-5, to understand what services they provide to support children's speech, language and communication development. We also asked them about the strengths of current service delivery, as well as challenges.
2. Visually mapping the range of services that support speech, language and communication currently on offer in Leeds and the connections between them.
3. Analysing data on children's communication and language outcomes, as well as the take up of the free entitlement to early education at age two, to see how this varies across the city.
4. Interviewing parents and carers in Harehills and Shepherd's Lane wards, where a lower proportion of children are currently reaching expected language and communication development in reception year, to hear about how they support their children to learn, what types of services they use and activities they enjoy, and any challenges they face.
5. Holding design workshops with local professionals, parents and carers to develop some new ideas for services and activities that would support children's language and communication development.

The project was carried out as a series of rapid sprints, as set out below.



# Leeds discovery project timeline



## Feedback from practitioners

**"If we could better understand who is and who isn't accessing services, we could listen to those families and learn how to better meet their needs and improve children's speech, language and communication outcomes."**

**"How can we engage and meet the needs of families in Harehills who aren't currently engaging in activities that support their children's early language and communication?"**

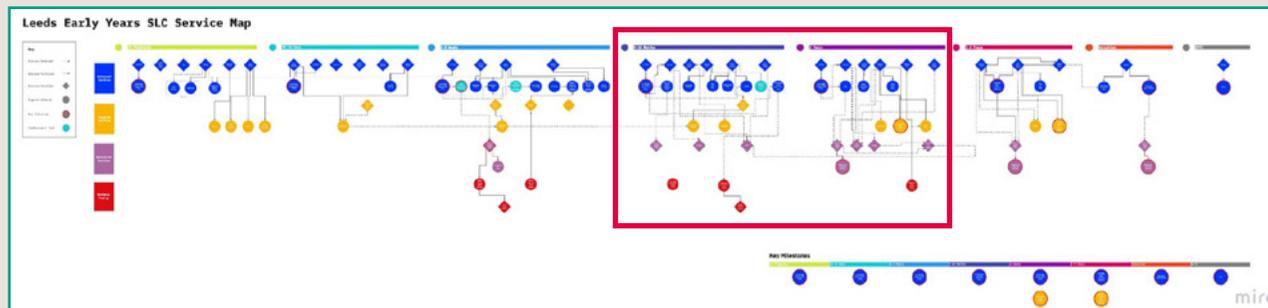
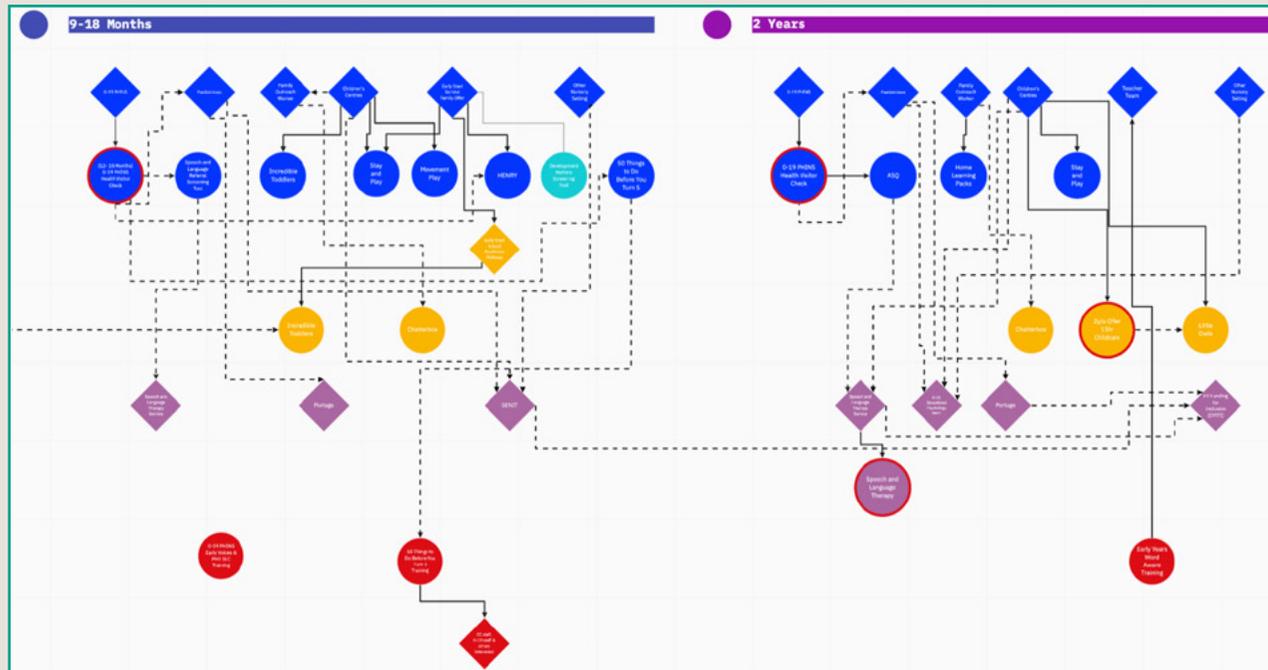
# System mapping

## Mapping speech, language and communication services in Leeds

- > We set out to understand the current ecosystem of speech, language and communication support for families in the early years.
- > We interviewed 10 practitioners working in a range of services and created a map of services.



# Service map



[Click here to explore the map in Miro.](#)

## Key observations from mapping and professional interviews

- > There is a really **rich and varied early years speech, language and communication (SLC) service offer** in Leeds, but the system is quite **complex** and **signposting/referral** pathways may not always be consistent.
- > Practitioners are **highly motivated to support children's SLC outcomes** and tailor their approach based on families' needs.
- > There is **no single approach to identifying children in need of support** – the 10 professionals we interviewed mentioned **nine different assessment tools** used to screen for SLC needs.
- > There is potentially a **gap in support** for families with children aged two to four who are not accessing early education.
- > There is high demand and **long waiting lists for Leeds' speech and language therapy service** – this has been exacerbated by COVID-19.

# Data analysis

## Aims of the data analysis

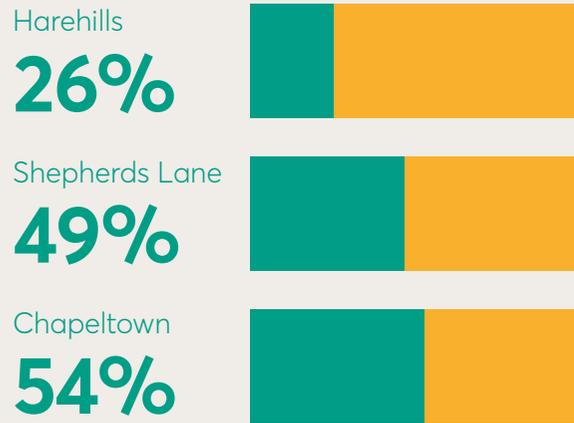
We set out to:

- > Identify geographical areas where there is **lower take-up of early education at the age of two.**
- > Identify geographical areas where children have **poorer communication and language outcomes at the age of five.**
- > Understand **which demographic groups are more at risk of having poorer SLC outcomes** (e.g. gender, economic disadvantage, being from a minority ethnic background, or speaking English as an additional language).



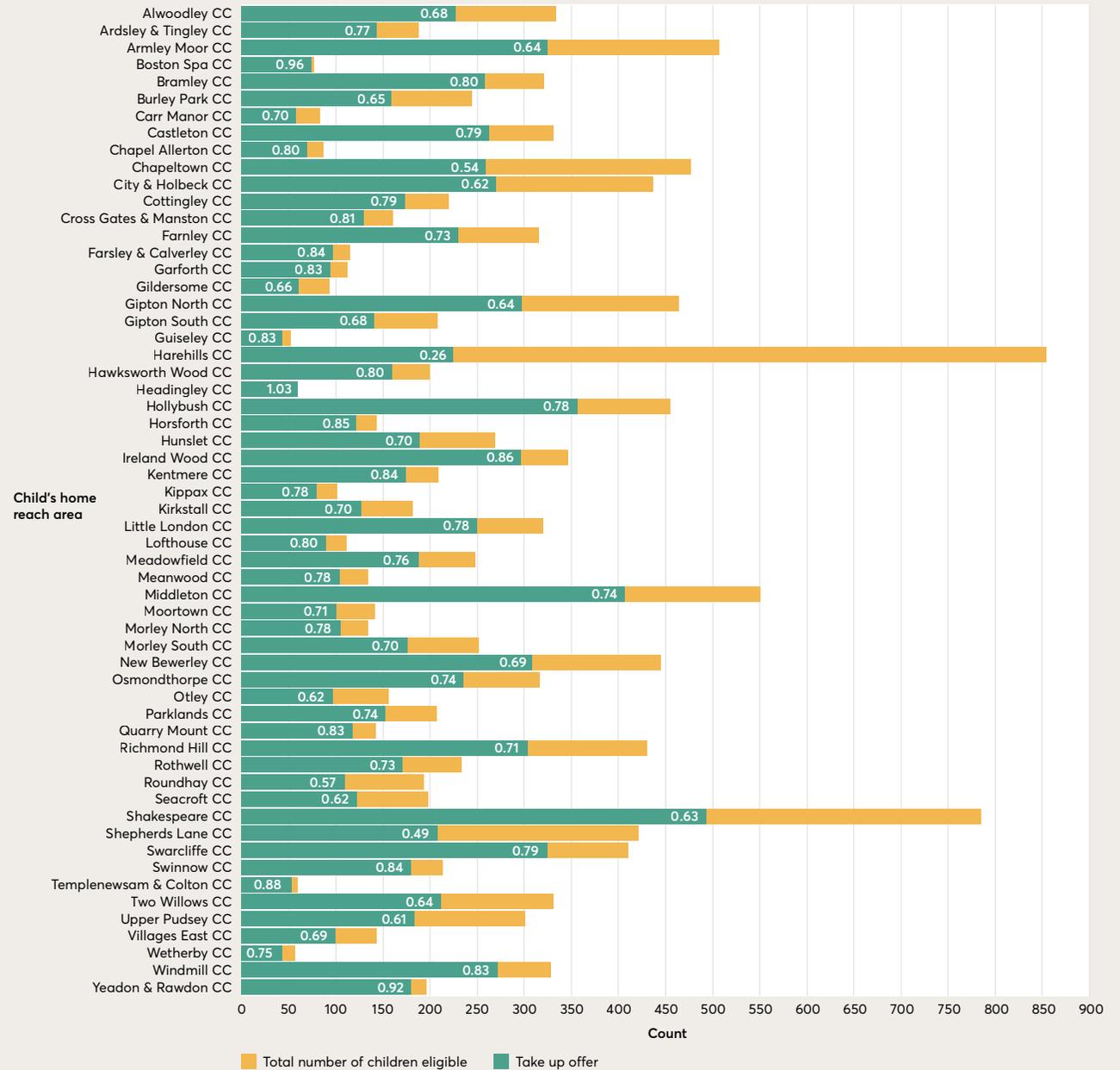
## Take-up rate of funded early education at age two – by Children’s Centre reach area

Top areas with low take-up:



In England in 2019, average take-up of FEEE was 68 per cent and it was **67 per cent in Leeds**

Methodology and sources: we had access to data from summer 2019, autumn 2019, spring 2020 and autumn 2020. We merged these datasets together and calculated the percentage using a sum over all the terms.

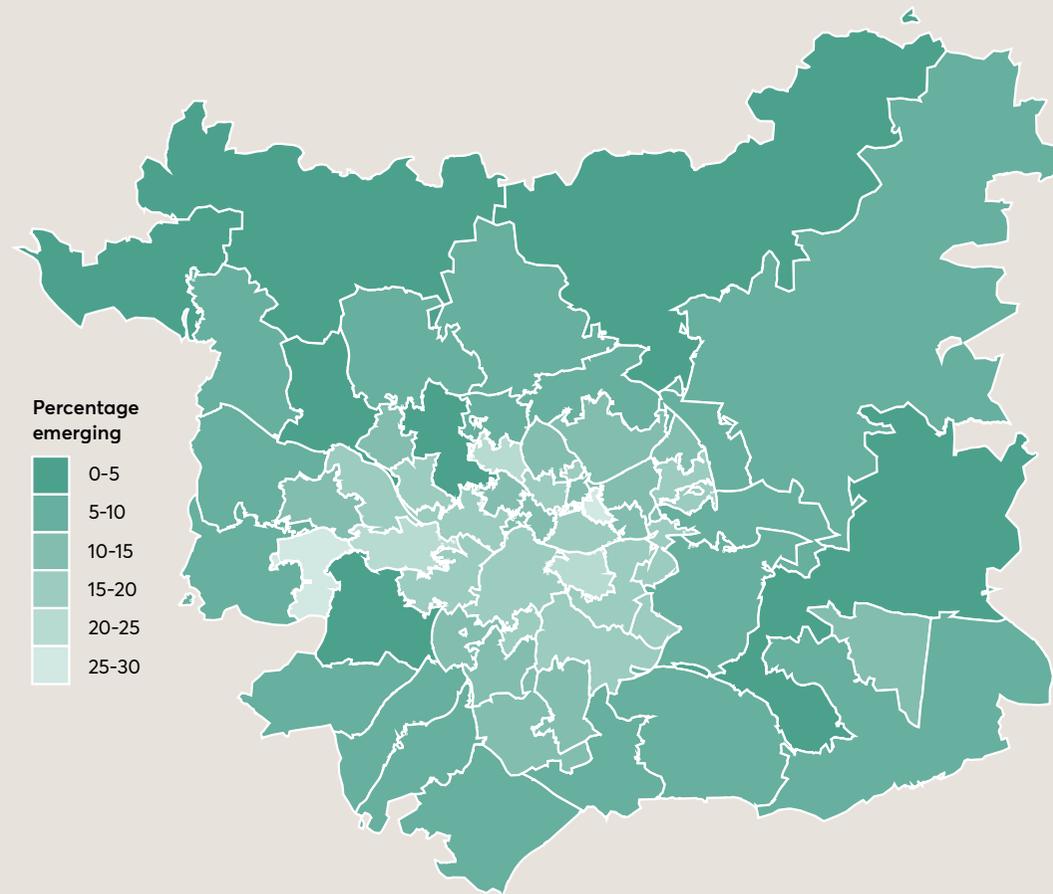


## Proportion of children not meeting expected communication and language development at EYFS by Children's Centre reach area (2019)

This map shows how children's outcomes for communication and language development vary across Leeds.

- > The darker colour indicates a lower percentage emerging, so better outcomes.
- > The lighter colour indicates a higher percentage emerging, so poorer outcomes.

It is based on 2019 data from the EYFS, therefore each Children's Centre reach area has a fairly small sample size.



## Focusing in on geographical areas where children have poorer outcomes

Leeds average = 18.9%, so Harehills has comparatively poor C&L outcomes, and Shepherd's Lane has comparatively good C&L outcomes

	% of children not reaching expected C&L level	Leeds average: % of children not reaching expected C&L level	% take-up of FEEE at age two	Leeds average: % take-up of FEEE	Proportion of under fives living in the most deprived decile (IMD, 2020)
Harehills	27.1%	18.9%	26%	67%	100%
Shepherd's Lane	13%	18.9%	49%	67%	100%

This is still the second lowest rate in Leeds, but take-up is substantially higher in Shepherd's Lane compared with Harehills

A lower proportion of children in Harehills are meeting expected communication and language outcomes at age five. Take-up of funded early education at age two is also lower in Harehills. Both Harehills and Shepherd's Lane have similar levels of deprivation, and similar ethnic diversity, but Shepherd's Lane has a higher take-up of childcare, and more children are meeting expected communication and language outcomes

Take-up data from summer 2019, autumn 2019, spring 202 and autumn 2020. EYFS data from 2019.

## Decision based on data analysis

Following the data analysis, we decided to focus qualitative research in the Harehills and Shepherd's Lane areas of Leeds, which are geographically adjacent.

# Engaging with families

## Evolution of the research question

**We arranged 13 interviews with parents living in Harehills and Shepherd's Lane.**

We wanted to find out about the experiences of local parents and carers:

1. Their understanding of activities and services that support SLC development.
2. How they currently support their child's SLC development with activities inside the home.
3. Their engagement with SLC related activities and services outside the home.
4. What social hubs exist for parents of young children in the community.
5. Their existing behaviours and needs.

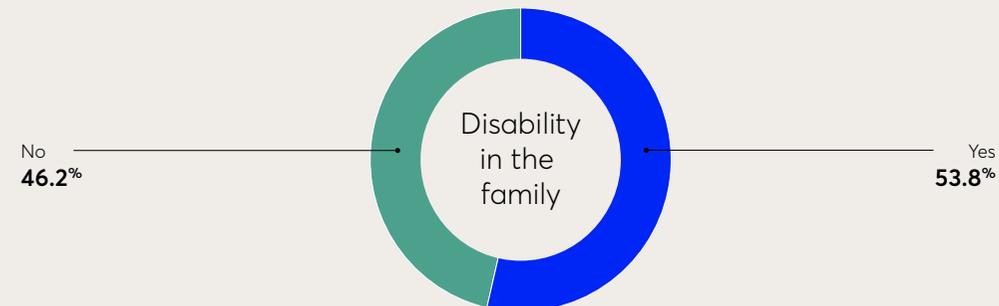
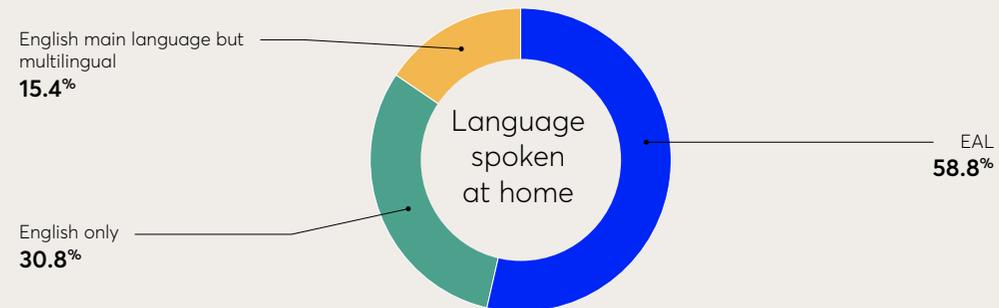
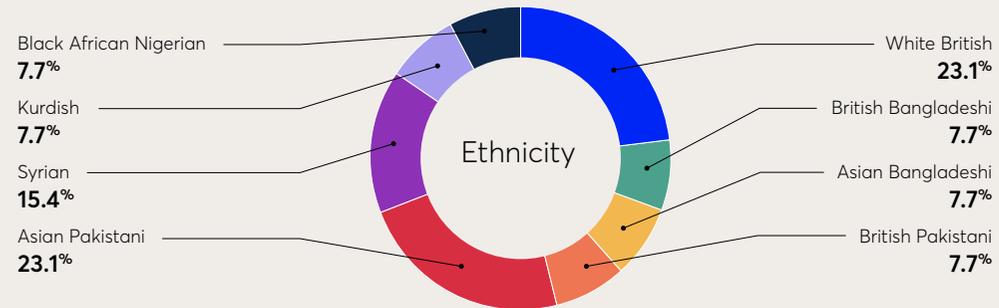
**"If we could better understand who is and who isn't accessing services, we could listen to those families and learn how to better meet their needs and improve children's speech, language and communication outcomes."**



**"How can we engage and meet the needs of families in Harehills who aren't currently engaging in activities that support their children's early language and communication?"**

# Sample of parent/carer interviewees

- > We interviewed 13 parents, 12 female and one male.
- > We aimed to recruit parents who reflected the diversity of Harehills and Shepherd's Lane and were broadly successful in that aim.
- > Recruitment materials were translated into common local languages.
- > We conducted five interviews with support from an interpreter as the parent/carer did not speak English.



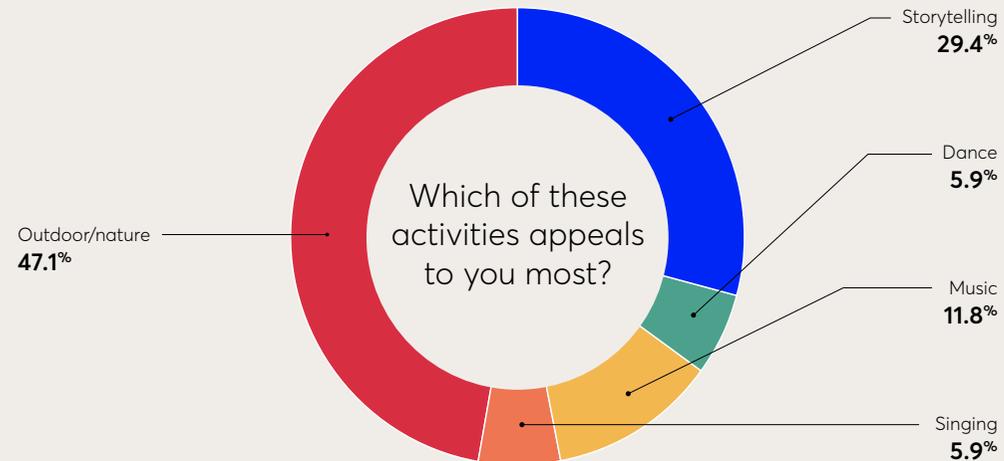
# Findings

**"Dance, music and singing, we're not interested in."**

**"I don't speak English. If it was in Arabic I might go."**

**"I want my child to be out, want her to be running around. I want her to get fresh air. I don't want her to be sitting from one place to sit in another place."**

**"I just feel that I'm not comfortable to go outside. Most of the time I spend at home."**



Ten out of 13 participants spontaneously mentioned the park as a place where they often spend time with their children.

The parks mentioned were Eastern Park, Roundhay Park, Potternewton, Temple Newsam.

# Key findings

## Parents' understanding of SLC, and experiences with services and their community

Parents **recognised the importance of supporting their child's SLC learning** at home. Some actively promoted **enriching activities**, but others faced **financial and time constraints** limiting their ability to do so.

The importance of **social networks** and being **well-connected to the community** in determining whether parents accessed support.

Parents' first port of call for **advice** was usually their child's **nursery** or the **GP**. Other **trusted figures** included **health visitors, support workers** and **family and friends**.

Most families had **heard of** the local **Children's Centre** and the **local library** – but the majority had **not accessed** them.

## Challenges facing parents in accessing support

**Lack of awareness** of what's on offer and how to access it – **gaps in signposting** and information about available support.

Finding it **difficult to know when to seek help** with their child's SLC, due to different rates at which children's skills can develop.

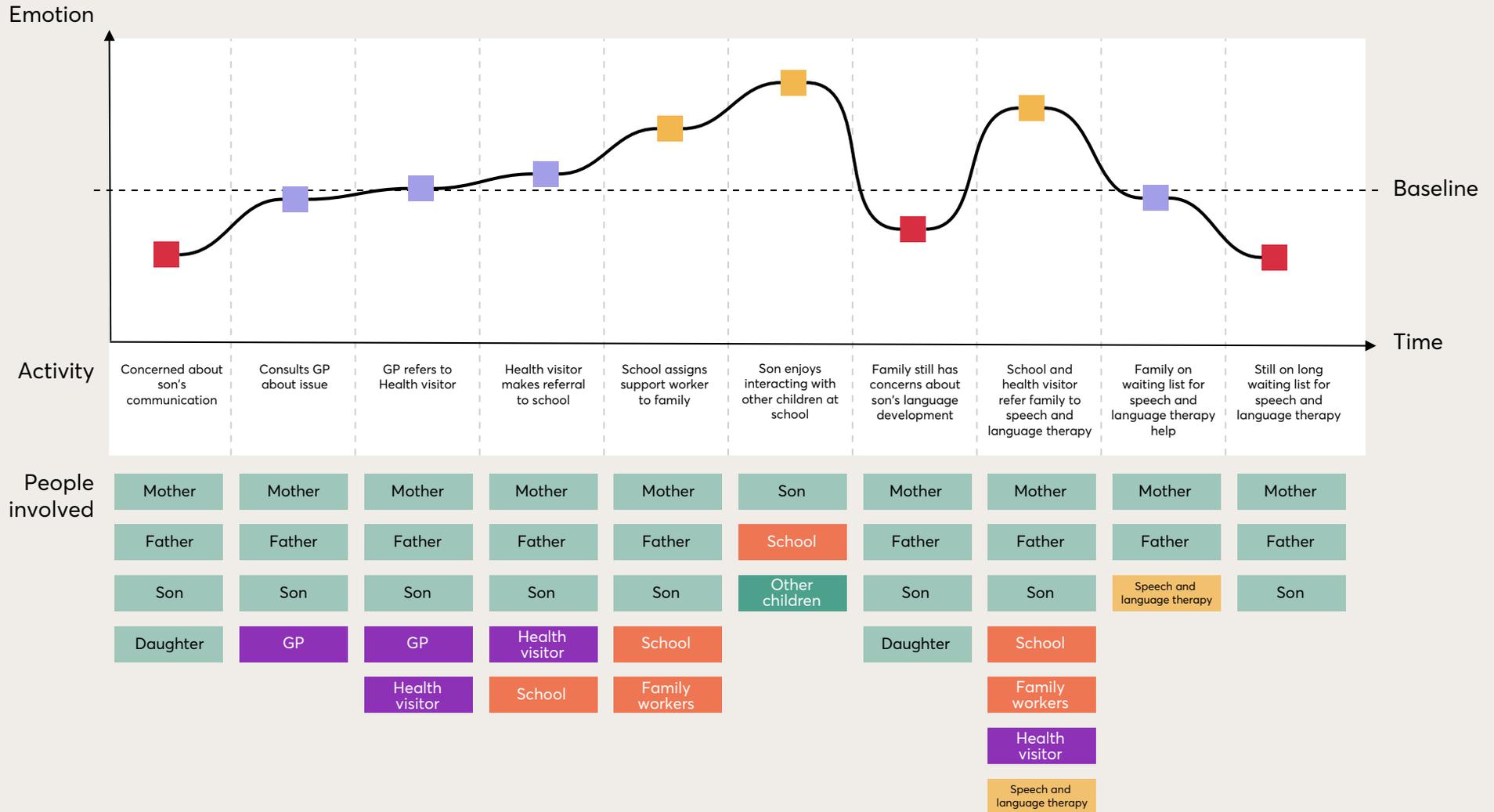
**The impact of COVID-19.**  
Activities, services and spaces closed or reduced capacity.

**Long waiting lists for S&L therapy** – and not having other support/not knowing how to support their child at home in the meantime.

**Language barriers** – support services often don't have staff who speak community languages/key learning resources are often not translated.

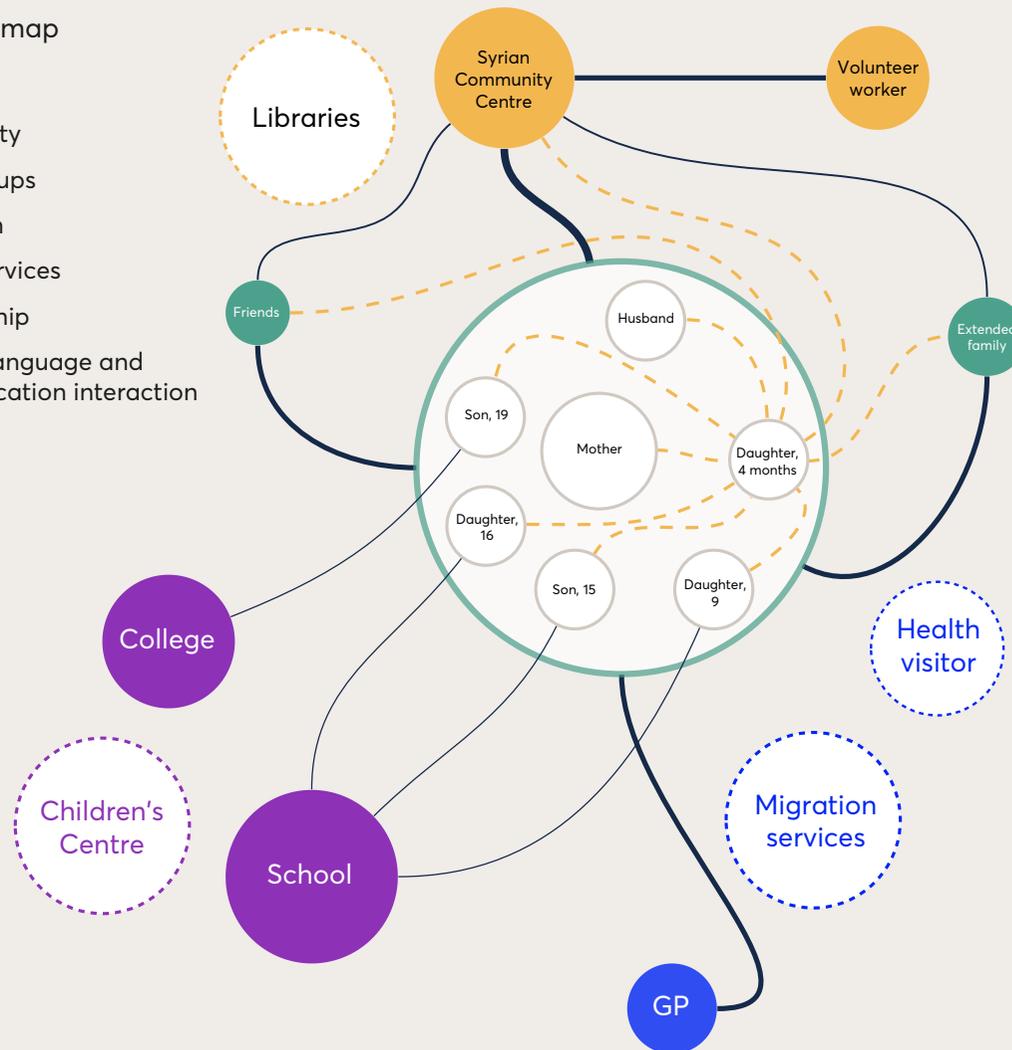
## A family's help-seeking journey

A family of two working parents are concerned about their youngest child's language development. This is their emotional journey as they try to get help from local services.



## Relationship map

- Family
- Community
- Local groups
- Education
- Health services
- Relationship
- Speech, language and communication interaction



## Biography

Mrs Huda, 35, has recently moved to Leeds from Syria, having made the journey via Jordan and Turkey.

### Family

She moved to Leeds with her husband and five children. Her oldest child is 19 and her youngest is four months old.

### Languages

Her older children speak a mixture of Arabic, Turkish and English. She and her husband speak Arabic, but do not speak English.

### Behaviours and habits

Her family is actively engaged with the Syrian Community Centre, which was her first port of call when she moved to Leeds.

She is not actively aware of, or engaged in any other community activities.

As an experienced mother, other mothers often ask her for advice.

She likes to spend time with her four-year old at the park, given COVID-19 restrictions.

# Prototyping workshops

## Ideas practitioners came up with:



Home learning packs for parents while they are on SLT waiting list



Pop up-tent in the park with games to support language development



Pop-up outdoor activities to get parents and children talking



Bring library buses to parks around Harehills and provide interpreters



Work with community groups to run sessions for new parents in their own language



Train parents as communication champions in each community to provide peer support



Flexible support on communication and language via text message

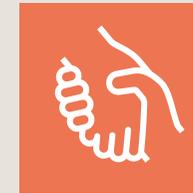
## Ideas parents came up with:



Pop-up tent in the park with games to support language development



Door knocking to ensure parents who aren't in touch don't miss out



Public space interventions to encourage help-seeking behaviour



Integrate parent champions with local groups to deliver SLC tips specific to each community in Harehills



Send outdoor activities for parents to engage with children's SLC via text

# Key findings from workshops

## What we learned from parent feedback

Parents and practitioners came up with ideas that overlapped, particularly around the areas of:

- > Pop-up outdoor activities in local parks to reach communities.
- > The need to work with local groups to deliver community-specific advice.
- > The use of alternate modes of communication with services, such as texting.

The main concerns expressed by parents in relation to ideas from practitioners were:

- > Accessibility; particularly with the need for interpreters at public outreach events.
- > Flexibility; the amount of time needed to engage in additional activities given busy schedules.
- > Ensuring these services were offered in addition to access to specialist support, and not as a way of keeping parents at bay while on a long waiting list.



# Next steps

## Opportunity 1: Standardising SLC screening tools

We learned that there are **lots of different tools used by** practitioners across Leeds to **assess children's SLC needs**.

- > Developing a **more standardised approach to SLC assessment and screening** across the early years system could ensure a **more consistent approach** and identify children with delayed development early.





## Opportunity 2: Integrating data to improve support for families

We found there are challenges around **integrating and sharing granular data** which make it harder to **understand need and target support**.

- > **Using data to improve support for families:** help facilitate improved data sharing between health and other services to enable targeting of support including outreach to increase families' engagement with SLC and other services.

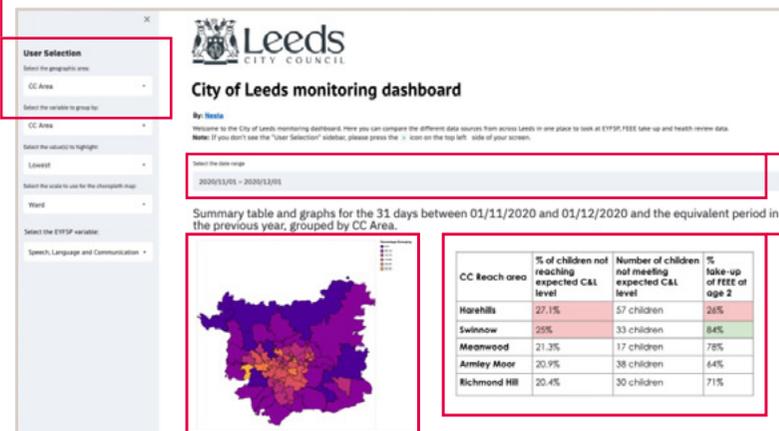
**Data work we would like to do in the next stage of the partnership.**

- > Map which services hold which datasets in Leeds and who to contact to access the data.
- > Facilitate improved data sharing between health and other services.
- > Move from using aggregated data to using anonymised child-level data – to understand the intersection between take-up of different services, and the

- relationship between take-up and ethnicity, gender, location\*, and other factors.
- > This would give a better understanding of need in communities and allow for better targeting of support and outreach.
- > Carry out similar analysis across York and GMCA/Stockport – what can we learn from working in multiple LAs, and how can we apply learning across places?

Here you can add selections to filter the data, e.g. use CC reach area as the geographical scale instead of ward.

We can add choropleth maps so you can get the overall view across Leeds. Again, what is shown on these maps can be filtered using the user selection.



We can add a date filter, so you can choose the timeframe you want to view the data over.

We can summarise the data in tables, highlighting the highest and lowest values for each column for ease of reading

\*Location refers to ward, CC reach area or cluster.

### Opportunity 3:

## Increasing families' engagement with SLC services and activities

We learned that **outdoor activities** would appeal to families, and also that **families don't know what's on offer**.



- > Building on these findings to **increase families' engagement with SLC services and activities** – e.g. by offering pop-up **SLC activities in the park**, and by **improving signposting** to services **via trusted figures** such as nursery teachers and GPs.

### Opportunity 4:

## Helping establish diverse community SLC champions

We learned that **social and community networks** are key in encouraging families to access support, and that **language can be a barrier** for accessing services.



- > Training up '**champions**' within **community organisations and networks** to help encourage parents in **diverse communities to engage in SLC services** and do SLC activities at home.

## Opportunity 5: Increasing families' engagement with SLC services and activities

We learned that there is **high demand and long waiting lists for speech and language therapy** in Leeds (which has been exacerbated by COVID-19), and that families don't always know **what other support is on offer** or what **activities they can do with their children at home** to support their SLC development.

- > Designing new ways to **support families on the waiting list for SLT** – e.g. through supporting families with **activities they can**

**do with their children at home,** or signposting and **connecting to other support** via outreach workers or third sector organisations.





# Fairer Start Local: developing a longer- term collaboration

Having tried out these short-term partnerships and found this to be an effective way of working, all of the partners involved in the discovery projects (Nesta, Leeds, Stockport and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and York) are now committed to building a longer-term collaboration over the next three to five years.

The new Fairer Start Local programme, which we are launching in November 2021, will build on the opportunities identified in the discovery phase of work reported here.

Through this partnership, we will develop new ways of supporting families in the early years, and test whether they are successful in closing the outcome gap for disadvantaged children.

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## About Nesta

We are Nesta, the UK's innovation agency for social good. We design, test and scale solutions to society's biggest problems. Our three missions are to give every child a fair start, help people live healthy lives, and create a sustainable future where the economy works for both people and the planet.

For over 20 years, we have worked to support, encourage and inspire innovation. We work in three roles: as an innovation partner working with frontline organisations to design and test new solutions, as a venture builder supporting new and early stage businesses, and as a system shaper creating the conditions for innovation.

Harnessing the rigour of science and the creativity of design, we work relentlessly to change millions of lives for the better.

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