

I am emailing to confirm system-wide changes in line with the GM Balanced System transformation, which affect our current EY/ Preschool pathway into Bolton NHS SALT going forwards, as outlined below.

Talking Walk-in webpage on the Bolton Start Well Website (for professionals)

Talking Walk-Ins for pre-school children and their families

Information for Early Years Professionals

Key message:

Talking Walk-Ins are replacing the existing pre-school referral route for speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Early Years professionals should continue to use the Bolton Early Years Integrated Communication and Language Pathway and support families with universal and targeted strategies as good practice.

What is changing?

- From 17 July 2026, referrals to the pre-school Speech and Language Therapy Service will be paused to allow implementation of the Talking Walk-In.
- From 21 September 2026, Talking Walk-Ins will replace the existing pre-school referral routes.
- Instead of completing a formal written referral, families and professionals will access advice and support directly through a Talking Walk-In session.

What are Talking Walk-Ins?

- Talking Walk-Ins are informal, play-based drop-in sessions for families with children aged 0–4 years (preschool).
- They provide a friendly space for families to discuss concerns about speech, language and communication development.
- Families can receive advice from Speech and Language Therapists and Family Hub Practitioners, including practical strategies to use at home and in their Early Years setting.

Why is this change being made?

- The new model supports the Balanced System® approach.
- It promotes early identification and intervention.
- It improves timely access to support and reduces delay.
- It empowers families and practitioners with practical strategies.
- It helps ensure children receive the right support at the right time and prevents needs from escalating.

What does this mean for Early Years professionals?

- Continue using the Bolton Early Years Integrated Communication and Language Pathway.
- Keep implementing universal and targeted communication and language strategies within your setting.
- Continue to use WellComm screening where appropriate and the Big Book of Ideas inline with Bolton practice.
- Encourage families to attend a Talking Walk-In when concerns are raised.
- Share relevant information and screening outcomes with families so they can take this to the session.
- Review and implement any advice or strategies provided following attendance.

Who can access Talking Walk-Ins?

- Families of pre-school children aged 0–4 years who are registered with a Bolton GP.
- Early Years practitioners.
- Health Visitors and other professionals supporting young children and families.
- No referral or appointment is required.

How does the process work?

- Families attend a Talking Walk-In session to discuss speech, language and communication concerns.
- A member of the Speech and Language Therapy service or Family Hub Practitioner offers advice and practical strategies.
- Families receive a record of the advice and strategies discussed.
- If specialist assessment or intervention is needed, this will be arranged following the session.

What should families bring?

- Information from the child's Public Health Nursing Team, Early Years provider or Start Well Locality Practitioner.
- Recent WellComm screening results.
- The child's Personal Child Health Record (Red Book).

Where will Talking Walk-Ins be held?

- Information about venues, dates, and times will be shared as soon as possible through the Best Start Family Hub website and social media.
- From 21 September 2026, Talking Walk-ins will be available every weekday at Bolton Best Start Family Hubs
- Further information will also be available on the Start Well website: [Bolton Talking Walk-Ins](#), through Early Years updates and in the Family Hubs Workforce Newsletter once the programme is finalised.

Our commitment

- This change strengthens a proactive, accessible, and responsive SLCN pathway.
- It supports early support for children and families through a streamlined, partnership-based approach.
- Early Years professionals remain central to identifying needs, supporting families and promoting communication and language development in everyday practice.

Thanks

Nic

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Named Professional for SEND

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