



HL Bill 6 of 2024–25

Support for Infants and Parents etc (Information) Bill [HL]

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The House of Lords is due to debate the [Support for Infants and Parents etc \(Information\) Bill \[HL\]](#) at second reading on 6 September 2024. This is a private member's bill sponsored by Lord Farmer (Conservative). The bill would introduce a legal requirement on local authorities in England to publish information about the support services available in their area for infants, parents or carers of infants, or prospective parents or carers. This would include information on maternity, health visiting and mental health services. The bill would also make it a legal requirement for the secretary of state to produce guidance for local authorities on the start for life offer and require the secretary of state to report annually on support available in England.

An almost identical version of the bill was introduced in the House of Commons during the 2023–24 parliamentary session. This bill, sponsored by Sally-Ann Hart (the then Conservative MP for Hastings and Rye), had its second reading without debate in the House of Commons in March 2024 but then fell due to the dissolution of Parliament in May 2024. The previous Conservative government supported the 2023–24 House of Commons bill. However, the new Labour government has not specified whether it would support this legislation or not.





I. Background to the bill

I.1 Conservative government action

In March 2021, the Conservative government published [‘The best start for life: A vision for the 1,001 critical days—the early years healthy development review report’](#). This set out findings from the ‘Early years healthy development review’ that had investigated ways to improve health and development outcomes for babies in England. Chaired by Andrea Leadsom (the then Conservative MP for South Northamptonshire), the review found that some parents and carers had found it hard to find support in their local area.¹ In response, the Conservative government set out its vision for improving support for new families across six action areas, focused on the “1,001 critical days” from conception to the age of two.² This included requiring local authorities to establish “a coherent and joined up ‘start for life’ offer” that explained to parents and carers what services they were entitled to and how they could access them.³

In the October 2021 budget and spending review, the Conservative government announced an investment of £500mn over three years for start for life and family help services.⁴ In November 2021, the government confirmed the investment would include a £300mn package to “transform” services for parents, babies, carers and children, in half of the local authorities in England.⁵ It said this

¹ HM Government, [‘The best start for life: The early years healthy development review report’](#), March 2021, CP 419, p 7.

² As above, p 8.

³ As above, p 35.

⁴ HM Treasury, [‘Autumn budget and spending review 2021’](#), 27 October 2021, HC 822 of session 2021–22, p 68.

⁵ Department for Education, [‘Children’s minister address to National Centre for Family Hubs’](#), 2 November 2021.



would include funding for local authorities to publish their start for life offer.

In February 2023, the Conservative government's report '[The best start for life: A progress report on delivering the vision](#)' (updated 4 April 2023) set out what progress had been made towards supporting new families. Alongside this report, the government published guidance to support local authorities to develop and promote a start for life offer: '[Publishing your start for life offer](#)'. This included information on what local authorities should include in their start for life offer and general principles for publishing it, including using digital resources and outreach to raise awareness of the offer.

1.2 Private members' bills

During the 2023–24 parliamentary session, Sally-Ann Hart (the then Conservative MP for Hastings and Rye) sponsored the '[Support for Infants and Parents etc \(Information\) Bill 2023–24](#)'. This private member's bill would have placed a legal duty on English local authorities to publish a start for life offer on their website.⁶ The Conservative government supported the bill, with the Department of Health and Social Care publishing [explanatory notes](#) in February 2024 and a [delegated powers memorandum](#) in March 2024. The Conservative government said it expected the bill to have some financial implications for both local authorities and government, but these were not expected to be significant.⁷ Following its second reading without debate in the House of Commons, the bill fell at the dissolution of Parliament in May 2024.

⁶ UK Parliament, '[Support for Infants and Parents etc \(Information\) Bill 2023–24](#)', updated 4 June 2024.

⁷ [Explanatory notes to the Support for Infants and Parents etc \(Information\) Bill 2023–24](#), p 12.



Following the change of government in July 2024, Lord Farmer has reintroduced the legislation as a House of Lords private member's bill. The bill is identical to the previous House of Commons bill except for the bill's commencement provisions.⁸ The [explanatory notes](#) were also republished in the name of Lord Farmer to facilitate scrutiny of the bill in the House of Lords.

Lord Farmer described the importance of the bill as follows:

Evidence unambiguously points to how critical the first 1,001 days of life (from conception to the age of two) are to babies' and children' outcomes throughout their lives. This is therefore a vital stage of family life to support. A new, joined-up and continually improving start for life offer was the focus of the early years healthy development review and a welcoming family hub the place where families could access start for life services and support. Whilst much is currently available to new parents, this review established how hard it is to access information about available support so they can draw on it when they need it most. This bill [would] ensure local authorities publish a start for life offer, [specify] services to be included and [require] the government to publish evidence-based guidance on an ongoing basis.⁹

2. What would the bill do?

The bill would require local authorities in England to publish information about the support services available in their area for

⁸ UK Parliament, '[Support for Infants and Parents etc \(Information\) Bill 2023–24](#)', updated 4 June 2024.

⁹ Text provided by Lord Farmer to the House of Lords Library.



infants, parents or carers of infants, or prospective parents or carers.

Clause I would require English local authorities to publish a “start for life offer” on their website under the heading ‘start for life’. This offer would contain information about the services available in their area for infants, parents and carers of infants, or prospective parents and carers. This offer would need to contain information about services provided by or on behalf of a public authority, including:

- maternity services
- health visiting services
- services promoting positive relationships between infants and their parents or carers
- breastfeeding and other infant feeding services
- mental health services

The offer would also need to include any other services as could be specified by the secretary of state in future regulations. These regulations would be made by statutory instrument following a draft instrument being approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

Local authorities could also choose to include other services that they considered appropriate, regardless of whether they were provided by or on behalf of a public authority.

In addition to publishing the offer on their website, local authorities would be required to publish the offer by any other means they considered appropriate. They would also need to take steps to bring



the offer to the attention of parents and carers of infants, and prospective parents and carers, in their area, as well as ensure the offer was kept up to date.

Clause 2 would require the secretary of state to publish guidance for English local authorities relating to their duty to publish a start for life offer. The secretary of state would need to consult with English local authorities and other stakeholders they considered appropriate before publishing or revising this guidance.

Clause 3 would require the secretary of state to publish a report each year that provides an overview of support available in England for infants, parents and carers of infants, and prospective parents and carers.

Clause 4 would specify that information would not need to be published under clauses 1 to 3 if it would otherwise breach data protection legislation. **Clause 5** would define an ‘infant’ for the purpose of the bill as a child under the age of two years. It would also define an ‘English local authority’ to mean:

- a county council in England
- a district council for an area in England for which there is no county council
- a London borough council
- the Common Council of the City of London
- the Council of the Isles of Scilly

Clause 6 would extend the bill’s provisions to England and Wales. However, the bill would apply in England only due to the definition of



‘English local authority’ in clause 5. Clause 6 would also prescribe when the bill’s provisions would come into force.

3. What has the new Labour government said?

Since the 2024 general election, the new Labour government has not specified whether it would support the bill. On 30 July 2024, a written question tabled by Steve Darling (Liberal Democrat MP for Torbay) asked the secretary of state for health and social care whether he would make it his policy to continue funding family hubs and the start for life programme. The government is due to provide its response by 2 September 2024.

The Labour Party’s manifesto included several commitments to introduce policies to support families. For example, it said a Labour government would take an initial step to open an additional 3,000 nurseries.¹⁰ The party also said it would review the parental leave system within the first year of government. It said that supporting children in the early part of their life meant giving parents the flexibility they needed to care for their children.

4. Read more

- HM Government, ‘[Family hubs and start for life programme guide](#)’, August 2022
- Department of Health and Social Care Media Centre, ‘[Family hubs and start for life: Everything you need to know](#)’, 2 May 2024

¹⁰ Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 81.

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