

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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FAMILY HUBS & START FOR LIFE PROGRAMME

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Summary

In February 2023 Medway Council signed a memorandum of understanding with the Department for Education to participate in the Family Hubs and Start for life Programme. Medway will receive approximately £3 million over 3 years 2022-2025 to deliver a suite of services including parenting, infant feeding and perinatal mental health support, early language development and parent-infant relationship support delivered through a Family Hub model. This report provides an overview of the Family Hubs & Start for Life programme and Medway's approach to delivering it.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1. 'The best start for life: a vision for the 1,001 critical days' published in March 2021 as part of the early years healthy development review sets out 6 areas for action to improve health outcomes for all babies in England:

- Seamless support for families
- A welcoming hub for families
- The information families need when they need it
- An empowered start for life workforce
- Continually improving the Start for Life offer
- Leadership for change

1.2. At the 2021 Autumn Budget, the government announced a three-year Family Hubs and Start for Life programme to deliver a step-change in outcomes for babies, children, young people, parents and carers. The programme is overseen by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Department for Education (DFE). The Government has allocated £301.75 million over 3 years (2022-25) for 75 local authorities to deliver a package of family support and Start for Life services through a Family Hub model.

1.3. The stated objectives of the programme are:

- To provide support to parents and carers so they can nurture their babies and children, improving health and education outcomes for all.
 - To contribute to a reduction in inequalities in health and education outcomes for babies, children and families across England by ensuring that support provided is communicated to all parents and carers, including those who are hardest to reach and/or most in need of it.
 - To build the evidence base for what works when it comes to improving health and education outcomes for babies, children and families in different delivery contexts.
- 1.4. Medway Council signed a memorandum of understanding with the Department for Education in February 2023 to participate in the Family Hubs and Start for life Programme. This arrangement will see around £3 million come into the authority to support delivery of the programme.
- 1.5. Delivery of the programme is shaped by the requirements of the national Family Hubs & Start for Life Programme Guide which sets out the expectations for participating local authorities. Funding is provided by Government to support local authorities in delivering the programme.
- 1.6. Family Hubs & Start for Life naturally compliments the Council Plan. In particular, the priority 'People – Supporting residents to realise their potential' and the outcomes 'Healthy & Active Communities' and 'Resilient Families' as well as being 'Child Friendly'.
- 1.7. Family Hubs and Start for Life also support the Council's Early Help and Parenting Strategies.

2. Background

- 2.1. On 1st April 2022, the Government announced that 75 local authorities (including Medway Council) would be eligible for a share of £301.75 million to develop a package of family support and Start for Life services delivered through a Family Hub model.
- 2.2. The Family Hub Model is a means of delivering access to a range of services for children aged 0-25 and their families including physical spaces (hub buildings), outreach work and online. Start for Life services are for 0–2-year-olds and their families and form a core component of this offer.
- 2.3. Following an expression of interest and sign-up process in October 2022 and submission of an initial delivery plan in December 2022, Medway Council formally signed up to participate in the programme in February 2023.
- 2.4. Medway Council will receive approximately £3million over 3 years (2022-25) to deliver the programme. The Government has allocated funding against seven areas of work as set out in the table below.

Table 1: Start for Life and Family Hubs Grant allocation.

| Strand | % of overall allocation |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Family Hubs Programme | 19.6% |
| Family Hubs Capital | 4.9% |
| Perinatal Mental health & Parent-Infant Relationships | 31% |
| Parenting Support | 15.7% |
| Infant Feeding Support | 16.1% |
| Early Language Development and Home Learning Environment | 9.3% |
| Publishing the Start for Life Offer and Parent Carer Panels | 3.5% |

2.5. The Programme Guide

- 2.6. In August 2023, the Government published the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme Guide setting out the expectations placed on participating local authorities and their delivery partners. In recognition of the fact that every local service offer is different, and each authority is starting the programme from a different point in the development of their service offer, the Programme Guide includes minimum expectations and go further options. Local authorities engaging with the programme are required to deliver all the minimum expectations and some of the go further options by 31st March 2025.
- 2.7. Under the terms of the Programme Guide, the Family Hubs funding is to support the creation and development of Family Hub networks serving children of all ages (0-25 years) and their families. It is provided to increase the range and number of services offered through hubs (onsite, online and via outreach) and to support developments such as improved service integration, addressing accessibility and engagement, training and development, building adaptations and creation of workforce capacity to deliver the transformation work.
- 2.8. The Programme Guide also sets out a list of 24 services (not funded by this programme) that participating local authorities should provide access to via the Family Hub network either face to face or virtually / online. These include Maternity, Health Visiting, activities for 0–5-year-olds, domestic abuse support, housing support, intensive targeted family support, 0-19 public health services, mental health services, nutrition and weight management services, reducing parental conflict, SEND support and youth work.
- 2.9. The Perinatal Mental Health and Parent-Infant relationships funding stream has been made available to promote positive early relationships and good mental wellbeing for parents, carers and their babies with a focus on mild to moderate perinatal mental health difficulties and universal parent-infant relationship support.

- 2.10. Funding for Parenting Support is intended to facilitate services to help all new and expectant parents make the transition to parenthood as smooth as possible, with an emphasis on the importance of sensitive and responsive caregiving. The focus is on universal provision, including parent & carer education and information delivered face to face in hubs and digitally. Clear pathways into targeted provision should also be provided for those with greater levels of need.
- 2.11. The Infant Feeding Support element of the programme requires local authorities and their delivery partners to develop a blended offer that will promote the benefits of breast feeding and support parents to meet their infant feeding goals. Support should include 1-2-1 practical help on hospital wards and in hubs to support breastfeeding initiation, responsive feeding and relationship building. Support should be universally available with more targeted support for those less likely to breastfeed. E.g., younger, first time and more vulnerable mothers.
- 2.12. Early Language Support and Home Learning Environments is aimed at children aged 3-4 whose speech and language development may have been impaired by experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. It aims to provide a range of interventions to support school readiness.
- 2.13. Funding has been made available to publish the Start for Life Offer through a variety of routes including digitally and online and to raise awareness with staff working across the system so that they are able to connect families to the offer as required.
- 2.14. It is a requirement of the programme that local authorities work with partners to establish a Parent & Carer Panel to put the needs of local children and families at the centre of service design and delivery.
- 2.15. Medway's Approach
- 2.16. Public Health and Children's Services are leading the programme on behalf of Medway Council due to the cross-cutting nature of the agenda.
- 2.17. Further to the publication of the Programme Guide in August 2022, a stakeholder engagement exercise was undertaken to begin scoping out existing provision and key areas for development.
- 2.18. A multi-agency working group has been established to oversee planning and delivery of the programme. In addition to Medway Council services such as Family Solutions, Public Health and the Early Years SEND service, representation is also drawn from delivery partners such as Medway NHS Foundation Trust Maternity Service, Medway Community Healthcare, Primary Schools, Homestart, Family Action, Medway Maternity Voices Partnership and Medway Parents & Carers Forum. This group reports to the Early Help Partnership Board for governance purposes with the Director of People as the Single Named Accountable Lead for the programme.

- 2.19. The programme is monitored by the Department for Education and includes a quarterly data return which feeds into a national data set.
- 2.20. Steps have been taken to ensure that the programme joins up with existing strategies and plans such as the Medway Infant Feeding Strategy, Medway Parenting Strategy and the Kent & Medway Perinatal Equity Strategy to ensure co-ordination of effort.
- 2.21. Medway has 4 Children & Family Hubs (Chatham, Strood, Gillingham and Wayfield and Rainham) which are managed by the Family Solutions Service. The Hubs currently offer a range of midwife and health visitor clinics, stay and play, parent toddler groups, healthy eating programmes, parenting programmes and family fun days. The intention is to build upon the existing offer at these sites and work with delivery partners to extend the range of activities and services available via the hub network throughout the week – including evenings and weekends. Funding from the programme will be used to enhance the Hub buildings, improving accessibility and flexibility to support delivery of the programme.
- 2.22. Medway will work with delivery partners to maximise access to Start for Life Services across the local authority footprint via outreach services at Family Wellbeing Centres and other council and community settings. A digital portal will provide parents and carers with a virtual 'one stop shop' from which to access information and support.
- 2.23. Perinatal mental health support for those with mild to moderate needs and universal parent infant relationships support will be further enhanced in collaboration with the Council's delivery partners, providing access to a range of group and 1-2-1 interventions and peer support in hubs, digitally and on outreach. A comprehensive package of workforce training will increase capacity across the system to identify perinatal mental health and parent infant relationship difficulties and provide support or engage more specialist services as necessary. Opportunities will be sought for greater service integration and co-ordination between mild to moderate services and acute services to drive service improvement.
- 2.24. A comprehensive universal parenting support package will be developed for parents and carers of children aged 0-2 years, including parent education groups (with face to face and virtual options), static and video online content and peer support groups. The package will be designed to support families through their pregnancy journey and making the transition to parenthood. Content will include maintaining a healthy pregnancy, supporting child development in early years, perinatal mental health, developing strong bonds and attachments, infant feeding, the importance of maintaining positive relationships and co-parenting and accessing local support via the Family Hubs network. The parenting support offer will include pathways into more targeted support, e.g., for parents and carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities pre and post diagnosis. Peer networks will also be developed for parents and carers requiring ongoing support.

- 2.25. The infant feeding support offer for Medway families will be developed to include round the clock 1-2-1 specialist support on the maternity ward at Medway Hospital. This service will provide assistance and advice for mothers with breast feeding initiation in the immediate antenatal period. Medway will grow its peer support networks and increase access to support via the Family Hub network. Insights work will be undertaken with groups less likely to initiate and maintain breast feeding and targeted approaches developed in accordance with need.
- 2.26. A tiered model of intervention for Early Language Development and Home Learning Environment will be established with Medway’s Health Visiting and Speech and Language services to ensure that children with delayed language development are identified early and referred for targeted intervention appropriate to the level of need with escalation to more specialist speech and language support as required. Interventions will feature group sessions and targeted work with parents and carers in the home. A universal digital platform to provide help and advice for parents and carers with supporting their child’s language development at home will be put in place.
- 2.27. Medway will seek to ensure that all parents are aware of the published Start for Life offer from the earliest stages of their parenting journey. The offer will be accessible via a digital portal providing a ‘one stop shop’ for services supporting families and their children from the point of conception to the age of 2 years. All expectant parents will be provided with hard copy information about the Start for Life offer and how to access it. A mixed mode marketing campaign will further promote and raise awareness of the offer.
- 2.28. A Parent Carer Panel will be established to ensure that the Family Hubs and Start for Life offer is co-designed with and shaped by service users. Medway will work with partners and community groups to ensure that the panel is representative of Medway’s diverse communities and adopts a range of approaches to ensure that the voices of underserved groups are heard.

3. Risk management

| Risk | Description | Action to avoid or mitigate risk | Risk rating |
|-------------------------------|---|---|-------------|
| Timescale for delivery | Family Hubs & Start for Life is a 3-year programme (2022/23 – 2024/25). The signed memorandum of understanding and first tranche of year one funding was received in February 2023 (i.e., a few weeks before the end of year 1) | Children’s Commissioning Lead to work with HR to ensure recruitment process works as quickly as possible. Children’s Commissioning Lead / Project Manager to work with Category Management to identify | B2 |

| Risk | Description | Action to avoid or mitigate risk | Risk rating |
|-----------------------|--|---|-------------|
| | <p>The scope of the programme is considerable and necessitates the creation of a transformation team and the commissioning of a wide range of work from providers.</p> <p>Recruitment and procurement processes take time and there is a risk that some projects and services might not be mobilised in time to have significant impact during the lifetime of the programme. Failure to get projects underway within the specified timescale may mean funding being clawed back by Government and the full potential impact of the programme not being realised for Medway residents.</p> | <p>most efficient ways to procure services.</p> <p>Children's Commissioning Lead / Project Manager to monitor delivery plan activity and escalate concerns as required.</p> | |
| Sustainability | <p>The funding for this programme is limited to 3 years. Setting up projects and services which are then decommissioned or withdrawn could have significant negative impact on the health and wellbeing of Medway's children and families. It also presents a reputational risk for Medway Council – particularly being relatively close (in terms of time) to the closure of Children's Centres</p> | <p>Children's Commissioning Lead and Project Manager to ensure all investment has a sustainable plan. E.g., investing in upskilling the workforce and the development of peer led services.</p> <p>Where possible, investment will be made in services and initiatives that will require no further funding but will have lasting benefit beyond the life of the programme. E.g., Creation of digital</p> | A2 |

| Risk | Description | Action to avoid or mitigate risk | Risk rating |
|------|-------------|---|-------------|
| | | resources, workforce training, improvements to hub infrastructure etc. Children's Commissioning Lead / Project Manager to work with Parent Carer Panel and Comms Team to manage the message about funding arrangements and the steps being taken to maintain the benefits of the programme after 2025. | |

For risk rating, please refer to the following table (please **retain** table in final report):

| Likelihood | Impact: |
|--|--|
| A Very high B High C Significant D Low E Very low F Almost impossible | 1 Catastrophic (Showstopper) 2 Critical 3 Marginal 4 Negligible |

4. Consultation

4.1. The following organisations have been consulted in the development of Medway's approach to Family Hubs & Start for Life:

- Medway Parents & Carers Forum
- Medway Maternity Voices Partnership
- Medway Community Healthcare
- Medway NHS Foundation Trust Maternity Service
- NHS Kent & Medway
- Medway Voluntary Action
- Homestart Medway
- Family Action
- Carers First
- Medway Educational Leaders Association
- Medway Children's Services
- Medway Council Public Health
- Medway Early Years SEND Team
- Medway Early Years Sufficiency Team and Family Information Service
- Department for Education

- Department of Health & Social Care
- The Anna Freud Centre
- The National Centre for Family Hubs

The following multi-agency groups have also been consulted:

- Medway Early Help Partnership Board
- Medway and Swale Clinical and Professional Advisory Board
- Medway Early Years Partnership Forum
- Medway Voluntary Action Community Update Meeting
- Medway Infant Feeding Strategy Group

5. Climate change implications

- 5.1. The Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme Guide stipulates that all parents should receive a hard copy of the Start for Life offer prior to the birth. To keep paper usage to a minimum, QR codes will be used to provide links to more detailed information online.
- 5.2. Steps will be taken to ensure that where possible, digital resources rather than paper / hard copy are provided for families. Family Hubs will enhance their IT infrastructure to support those families facing barriers to accessing the digital space.
- 5.3. Where paper / hard copy resources are necessary, steps will be taken to ensure that quantities are kept to reasonable limits to avoid waste and that where possible, resources are re-used and recycled.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1. Funding for the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme has been provided by Central Government from a ring fenced grant which must be spent by 31 March 2025.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

The Best Start for Life – A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973112/The_best_start_for_life_a_vision_for_the_1_001_critical_days.pdf

Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme Guide

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1096786/Family_Hubs_and_Start_for_Life_programme_guide.pdf