

<b>12 September 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Family Hubs and the Start for Life Programme.</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Clare Moore, Strategic Lead Youth Offending Service and Prevention.		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## **Executive Summary**

Thurrock Council is one of 75 local authority areas eligible to benefit from the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. Funding of £301.75 million has been allocated to the programme between 2022–2025 alongside an additional £28.7m to improve the home learning environment (HLE) for 3–4-year-olds, as part of the pandemic education recovery programme. Funding is dependent upon local authority areas meeting all programme requirements over three years.

Support for children aged 0-19 years, young adults up to 25 who have special educational needs and/or disability (SEND), and services to support parents/carers are being delivered through a family hub network. These services are designed to enhance and expand a range of existing children's centre and early help provision. Local authority areas must involve parents and carers in the development and design of local services (co-production) and look at opportunities to co-locate services including those delivered by the voluntary sector and community groups.

The programme has a focus on the Start for Life period from conception to age two, incorporating recommendations from *'The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days'* review (2021). In response to this, funding has been specifically allocated to develop or enhance perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships services, and infant feeding and parenting support. Local authority areas are also required to deliver a range of multi-agency core services through their family hub network.

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

**1.1 That Members receive this report for information and note the progress of the requirements and responsibilities of local authority areas engaged in the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 The Family Hubs and Start for Life programme was launched in April 2022 and aims to improve a range of physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing and education outcomes for children aged 0-19, young adults to age 25 with SEND, and parents/carers. Services and support will be delivered through a family hub network designed to meet local need. The programme is aligned with existing government programmes that are already delivered in Thurrock including Supporting Families (previously known as Troubled Families) and Reducing Parental Conflict and builds on the delivery of the Healthy Child Programme 0-19 public health services.

2.2 Seventy-five local authority areas are currently eligible to join the programme based on levels of deprivation and health and education outcomes. £301m has been allocated to the programme over a three-year period (2022 – 2025) with a further £28.7m allocated to improve early language development / home learning environments (HLE) for 3–4-year-olds as part of the pandemic education recovery programme.

2.3 The programme grant comprises of a fixed rate for all local authority areas. Local authority areas are required to meet all the ‘minimum expectations’ set out in the Programme Guide by March 2025 and funding is predicated on this. In addition to meeting the minimum requirements, local authority areas must also commit to identifying ‘go further’ options to expand and enhance their family hub services. Funding must be used to improve the offer for children and families and so if local authority areas already have most, or all the minimum requirements in place, it is expected that more ‘go further’ options will be delivered. In Thurrock ‘go further’ options will be designed to meet assessed need eg tailoring services to engage groups that we know from local data are less likely to access universal and targeted early help services.

2.4 The programme has a focus on ‘Start for Life’ support for children and families from conception to age two (the ‘1001 critical days’). *‘The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days’* review published in March 2021 found that services offered during this period can be disjointed and difficult for families to navigate meaning some do not access the universal or targeted support they need. The review identified perinatal mental health, parent-infant relationships and breastfeeding support as essential services but found that support in different areas was inconsistent. To address this, funding has been earmarked through the programme to enhance and expand a range of Start for Life services through family hubs, these are referred to as the ‘funded elements’:

- perinatal mental health/parent-infant relationships
- infant feeding

- parenting support
- early language / HLE

These services aim to support a smooth transition to parenthood, the development of secure attachments, and school readiness, thereby reducing the need for specialist support.

2.5 There are three additional funded elements within the programme which will underpin the development and delivery of local family hub models:

- Parent and Carer Panels must be established for expectant parents and those with children aged 0-2, so that service users are involved in service design and delivery, this is known as 'co-production'
- A Start for Life Offer must be published both online and in hard copy, so families are clear what services and support are available to them during the 'critical 1001 days'
- Transformation funding is available to support local authority areas through their change/transformation process to develop their local family hub model. It is not intended to cover the costs of family hubs and Start for Life services. Transformation funding includes a small capital element which can be used for such things as adaptation of existing buildings to improve accessibility or space, IT upgrades to facilitate multi-agency working, or the purchase of essential equipment or furniture.

2.6 In addition to the funded elements, family hub networks must also deliver the following core services for children and families from existing funding sources, e.g. core grants and other programme funding arrangements:

- activities for children 0-5 eg interactive stay and play sessions
- debt & welfare advice and housing support
- domestic abuse support
- early childhood education & care and financial support (early years entitlements)
- SEND support and services (inclusive of the Start for Life period)
- health visiting 0-5 years and midwifery/maternity
- intensive targeted family support including through the Supporting Families programme
- local authority 0-19 public health services
- mental health services beyond those provided through the Start for Life offer
- nutrition & weight management
- oral health improvement
- reducing parental conflict & support for separating parents
- stop smoking support
- substance (alcohol / drugs) misuse support

- Youth services – universal & targeted including youth justice

These core services are delivered by local authority teams and partner agencies, with some commissioned from the voluntary sector. Many were already delivered from Thurrock's Children's Centres and Youth Hubs and so this programme provides the opportunity to build on this strong base and ensure these services are part of the local family hub offer. Local authority areas can choose to deliver additional services from their family hubs if this will meet local need.

- 2.7 The programme's objective is to join up and enhance services delivered through a network of family hubs, ensuring that all parents and carers can access the support they need when they need it.
- 2.8 Family hub networks can include a range of existing delivery points including children's centres, youth hubs, partner led premises, and community outreach sites where programme-related provision is already offered. These will be augmented by a comprehensive virtual offer. Guidance regarding central branding conventions for family hubs will be provided for local authority areas to use alongside existing local branding in recognition that families will be familiar with this.
- 2.9 Local authority areas are required to engage with emerging digital solutions and Thurrock Council is represented on the Family Hubs Growing Up Well project co-design group. This project will conduct testing and implementation of various digital solutions in a small number of local authority areas in Year 1, incorporating all local authorities in 2023-24.
- 2.10 Each local authority area is required to submit a Delivery Plan by the end of 2022. This will sit alongside locally owned plans and set out the overall ambition for change over the 3 years of the programme and show how funding will be used to achieve funding objectives. The Delivery Plan will set out medium to long terms goals including 'go further' options, milestones for opening family hubs and financial modelling. Each local authority will be assigned a Regional Delivery Lead, to support this process.
- 2.11 The Programme will be closely monitored by the Family Hubs Unit with quarterly updates regarding progress of the Delivery Plan and management information/outcome data, and bi-annual financial monitoring returns. The Family Hub Unit is working with a small group of local authorities to develop and test the management information dataset and Thurrock's Performance Quality Business Intelligence service is part of this team.
- 2.12 In terms of the programme timetable, 2022/23 counts as Year 1. There is an expectation that local authority areas will seek to open family hubs during the first half of 2023 and start to deliver visible change. Start for Life Offers should be published, and Parent and Carer Panels established, by April 2023. Local authority areas also need to conduct a local population needs assessment during Year 1 or build upon existing Joint Area Needs Assessments.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 Thurrock partners have a strong history of working together to develop and enhance cohesive universal, targeted and specialist services and support for children, young people, and families across Thurrock, currently through the Brighter Futures Partnership Board. The Partnership is chaired by the Corporate Director Children's Services and is well placed to oversee the implementation of the programme in Thurrock. A Family Hub and Start for Life Programme Board has been established which reports to the Partnership and is responsible for overseeing the implementation of Thurrock's Delivery Plan. It is chaired by the AD Early Help and Children's Services, who is also the programme's named accountable person.
- 3.2 Thurrock's children's centres already hosted or delivered a number of the multi-agency core services set out in paragraph 2.6 and they have evolved to meet changing local need e.g., increasing their age range from 0-5 to 0-11 in 2018. The service was already underpinned by the three Family Hub principles of accessibility, connection, and relationships and, along with Thurrock's youth hubs, is well placed to transform into a family hub network within required timescales.
- 3.3 7 of the 8 Children's Centres rebranded to Family Hubs at the end of April 2023. The last Hub, Stifford will go live at the end of July. Tilbury, Aveley and Stifford, the 3 main Family Hubs have been refurbished and upgraded, by utilising the Family Hubs Transformation Capital funding and they held Family Fun days in the May school holiday to mark the occasion. Official openings will take place on the 24 October.
- 3.4 There are 3 main family hubs one in each of the three Children Services localities (West, East and Central), with the smaller hubs as part of the broader network. The network also includes existing sites delivering early help services such as youth hubs, Health Centres including the Integrated Medical, Wellbeing Centre in Corringham, Libraries, Sunshine Centre, East Tilbury, and Orsett Village Halls sites (known as 'spoke's) and outreach delivery points including voluntary sector and community support.
- 3.5 Strategic managers have worked together to develop the 'go further' options for the funded elements of the programme. These were submitted as part of the sign-up process for consideration by the Family Hub Unit Infant feeding, parenting support and early language/ HLE sit within local authority / public health areas of responsibility and the 'go further's' sought to expand our evidence-based parenting programme offer and the provision of perinatal / 0-2s health services, and early years support across the family hub network. Opportunities to extend the co-location of practitioners from partner agencies and promote multi-agency workforce training is underway with Midwifery, Health Visiting, Debt and Welfare advice, Domestic Violence support, Housing, Reducing Parental Conflict and Stop smoking support already being

delivered. Oral Health and Weight management will follow in the coming months.

- 3.6 The Family Hub model is underpinned by co-production to ensure families and young people are involved in the co-design of family hub services and how and where they will be delivered. Whilst our Parent and Carer Panel will help to achieve this in relation to the Start for Life offer, a broad communication and consultation strategy is in development. This will include opportunities to engage young people as well as parents / carers and will have a focus on reaching seldom heard groups.
- 3.7 The Parent Carer Panels have been established in all 3 localities and have had 2 meetings each so far. The Panels are helping us drive the programme forward and have been consulted on a number of items, including the Start for Life Digital Offer and the Family Hub timetables.
- 3.8 The Start for Life website went live on the 28 April, whilst it is still a work in progress, the site already contains a wealth of information on the support available to families. We will be holding a formal consultation with residents in the Autumn.
- 3.9 There has been regular communications with residents, including a postcard that gives information on services, their location and how to access the Start for Life digital offer. Translation into other languages is underway, so we can engage those seldom heard groups.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 To ensure Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are aware of the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme and the responsibilities that attach to local authority areas engaged in the programme.
- 4.2 Collectively, Thurrock partners were already meeting the early help needs of many local families, however management information showed that some seldom heard groups are less likely to access some services or come late. This programme gives partners the opportunity to work together to target those harder to engage groups, ensure that all families are aware of the support that is on offer particularly in the Start for Life phase, and enhance and expand existing universal and targeted early help services to meet local need through a family hub network.

#### **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 As stated above, a Consultation and Communication Strategy is being developed to ensure that young people and families can be involved in service design. We have had 3 workshops with the Community and Voluntary sector, and more are being arranged. We have met with the Youth Cabinet who have given their views on what the Hub delivery could like for Adolescents.

## **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance, and community impact**

- 6.1 Ensuring that children have the best start in life is a priority for the Brighter Futures Children's Partnership Board and the Health and Well-being Board. The Family Hubs and Start for Life programme will promote this.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Strategic Lead Corporate Finance – Resources and Place Delivery**

Programme funding is predicated upon effective delivery of the minimum requirements of the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme over the next three years. Matched funding is not a feature of the programme.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Urenna Nwulu**  
**Safeguarding Solicitor – Team Leader**

The work of Family Hubs and the proposals outlined in this report supports Thurrock Council's duty under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need. This is a general duty to provide a range and level of services to children in need.

Under Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, the Council is required to cooperate with its relevant partners with the view to improve the well-being of children in its area. The Children and Families Act 2014 sets out the statutory requirement and responsibilities for the Council and its partners in providing support and services for children, young people, and families. This legislation is underpinned by statutory guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018), which states that, "Local areas should have a comprehensive range of effective, evidence-based services in place to address assessed needs early." The Family Hubs and the Start for Life Programme will support the Council in meeting its statutory responsibilities to meet need early.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**

## **Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities**

Thurrock's local Family Hubs and Start for Life programme will have a focus on consulting with and supporting families from seldom heard groups including ethnic minority communities, care leavers, vulnerable adults, fathers, and families of children with SEND.

- 7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report**

[Family hubs and start for life programme: local authority guide - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674222/family_hubs_and_start_for_life_programme_local_authority_guide.pdf)

9. **Appendices to the report**

None

### **Report Author**

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