

Cabinet

18th March, 2025

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Councillor P Seaman

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Children and Education Services

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Family Hub and Start for Life Programme

Is this a key decision?

Yes - the proposals involve financial implications in excess of £1m per annum and are likely to have a significant impact on residents or businesses two or more electoral wards in the City.

Executive Summary:

The Council currently operates 8 Family Hubs to deliver place-based integrated offer to families across the City, including the offer from the buildings, through an outreach community model and a new digital offer.

Coventry City Council was selected as one of 75 Local Authorities to join the national Family Hub and Start for Life Programme commencing in 2022-2025 (first 1001 days), including financial investment to strengthen its offer to babies, children and families building on its previous achievements.

This Programme has already received £4.43m grant funding from the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department of Education across the 3 years 2022/23 to 2024/25 to deliver the Programme objectives. Coventry was also formally recognised as a trailblazer in this approach, one of only 13 sites across England, and has received many national ministerial and governmental visits and has contributed to national evaluations.

The Programme has been governed by a Family Hub Programme Board, supporting the work of 7 workstreams to ensure that all of the national minimum expectation, and most of the “go further”, of the framework are delivered within the Coventry Family hub offer, in line with the MOU associated with this grant. Regular updates have been provided to the

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, the Health and Wellbeing Board and other Boards and Forums on request.

Further funding has now been allocated to Coventry for financial year 2025/26, with a provisional maximum allocation of £1,583,700, subject to the Council meeting the current Programme expectations up to March 2025 and the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding to formalise the agreement to meet the new Programme expectations.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the progress to date of the Family Hub and Start for Life Programme and Trailblazer Programme.
2. Accept the grant funding for the purposes outlined in this report in respect of the Family Hub and Start for Life Programme and the Trailblazer Programme, for the financial year 2025/26.
3. Delegate authority to Director of Children and Education Services, following consultation with the Director of Finance and Resources and the Director of Law and Governance to enter into the necessary legal agreement/s to accept the funding.
4. Continue to agree that future reports on this grant and the Family Hub and Start for Life Programme are received by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children Services.

List of Appendices included:

None

[Background papers: Family Hub and Start for life Cabinet report, October 2022](#)

None

Other useful documents

[HM Government : The Best Start for Life : A vision for the 1001 critical days](#)

[HM Government : Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme Guide](#)

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Family Hub and Start for Life Programme

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 Family Hubs are a place-based way of joining up services locally in the planning and delivery of family services. They bring together services to improve access, build connections between families, practitioners, services and providers and put relationships at the heart of family support. Family hubs offer universal and targeted support to families with children of all ages up to 19 years and should provide support to families with young people with SEND up to 25 years. A comprehensive and effective Start for Life offer (0-2 years) should be at the core of the offer.
- 1.2 Coventry has pioneered the development and delivery of a Family Hub offer since 2018, and there are currently 8 Family Hubs delivering services to children, young people and their families through place based integrated working by a range of services, with some outreach and an emerging digital offer.
- 1.3 Coventry has been influential in the development of national and regional policy and practice regarding the development and delivery of Family Hubs to deliver early help to children, young people and families through place-based integration of services and working with our communities and residents to ensure that their needs are met, and their strengths and assets are utilised to help others
- 1.4 At the 2024 Autumn Budget, HM Government announced an ongoing commitment and extension to the previous government's Family Hub and Start for Life Programme. This is part of the Governments ambition and commitment to give all children the best start in life by increasing spending on early years and families' services, including £69 million from the Department of Education to continue the delivery of a network of family hubs across England.
- 1.5 In addition, the Department of Health and Social care committed £57 million for Start for Life services to families with babies and infants in the first 1001 days (conception to second year of life).
- 1.6 The funding is to continue and expand the delivery of integrated family support for families with children of all ages, as well as the mandated Start for Life services (midwifery, health visiting, parent- infant relationships and mental health, breastfeeding, safeguarding, and SEND offer)
- 1.7 The funding must continue to be used to enhance the Family hub offer (building, outreach and digital offer) regarding perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationship support, infant feeding support services, evidence-based parenting Programmes, promoting nurturing positive home learning environments, and ensuring that parents' and carers' voices are heard in the design, delivery and evaluation of services through our Parent Voice network.
- 1.8 There are clear expectations regarding how the funding should be allocated to deliver the required funding services as indicated, although there will be a level of flexibility in the 2025/26 allocation across the work strands. The only exception to this flexibility is for capital spend, which should only be used on capital activities.

1.9 Table 1: Distribution of the funding allocation across the relevant Programme strands

Strand	*%	£000
Family hubs Programme	14.2	225
Family hubs capital	6.3	100
Perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships	32.8	519
Parenting support	18.6	294
Infant feeding support	16.2	256
Home learning environment services	10.3	163
Publishing 'Start for Life' offers and Parent and Carer Panels	1.7	27
Total		1,584

*The distribution of funding has been rounded to one decimal place. The sum of percentages across strands may not total 100% due to this rounding.

- 1.10 The Family Hub Programme guide sets the minimum and “go further” expectations for 24 aspects of the offer (in the hub building, in the community and digitally) which includes the funded workstreams and the wider offer. Coventry reviews and self-assesses its maturity against these expectations and submits annual reports evidencing how these expectations are being met across the Family hub partnership offer.
- 1.11 As a trailblazer, Coventry has made outstanding process and demonstrated innovative practice in delivering the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme. Funding has enabled the offer to progress faster and harder in delivering new or improved services in perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships, and infant feeding, and in the overall offer.
- 1.12 Coventry co-chairs the Community of Practice for Family Hubs in the West Midlands, with colleagues from the Anna Freud Centre, and has provided ongoing support to both the funded and non-funded LAs in the region.
- 1.13 Coventry hosted a visit from Dame Andrea Leadsom in July 2023, we took part in a Parliamentary event in June 2024, to evidence our work, and most recently Justin Russell, Director General for DfE visited Coventry to see the work of the Family hubs.
- 1.14 Coventry has also taken part in national independent evaluations undertaken by Ecorys UK in partnership with Ipsos, Sheffield Hallam, University (SHU) commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) and have published case studies on the work of supporting families feeding their infants in the national family hub Programme newsletter.
- 1.15 The key principles of the Family Hub Programme are Access, Connections and Relationships. These have been activated across all workstreams, and across the wider services in the current grant and will remain the focus for the forthcoming year under the new grant. Significant progress has been made to ensure that the Family

hub offer includes the support available in the 8 hub buildings, in a wide range of community settings and digitally.

2. Headlines of progress

- 2.1 Access : All families need support from time to time to help their babies and children thrive and the intention of the Family Hub and Start for Life Programme is that every family will receive the support when they need it and should have access to the information and guidance that they need to care for and interact positively with their babies and children and to look after their own wellbeing. Investing in supporting families to care for their babies, children and young people has an important role to play in reducing health and educational inequalities, and improving their longer-term physical, emotional, cognitive and social outcomes.
- 2.2 Timetables of support are available termly, and special events and activities in the holidays, and are widely promoted to help reach families of children aged 0-19 (and up to 25 with a SEND). Within the current funded Programme 104,604 individuals have attended 35,984 activity/intervention at a family hub building. 600 people attended a family hub during the two weeks in the Christmas period of 2024. A PBI dashboard is in place to capture and evidence the reach of the current offer and a recent analysis has identified the cohorts of families to target in the forthcoming year.
- 2.3 Families can now register the birth of their baby at 3 of the Family hubs, and more sites are planned for the forthcoming year. 554 babies have been registered by their parents who have taken up this offer as an alternative to attending the city centre Registrar office and have then been connected to the wider family hub offer at the start of their parenting journey.
- 2.4 In June 2024 Coventry launched the new digital “one stop shop” portal for all information, advice and support for families www.coventryfamilies.co.uk. There are currently over 7,000 users, with 78,000 page views of the partnership content. This portal uses Ai and automation to enhance the human experience of the Family hub offer and is a key enabler in ensuring the offer is available and accessible by all.
- 2.5 Connections: Over 50 local services (public and the voluntary, community and faith sector), are part of the Family hub network and work together in partnership *with* families, as part of the Family hub offer within the buildings and in the local communities. Family Hub community practitioners have been deployed to over 40 community spaces to deliver the Family offer in faith buildings, community centres, libraries, food hubs and social supermarkets, University Hospital wards, etc. taking a localised whole family approach enabling families to access the help where they need it.
- 2.6 It is essential that services continue to integrate and innovate in providing services to help families get the support they need, where they need it, building on the experience of good partnerships and new and flexible working practices, developed in the first 3 years of the Programme. Developing the community offer further will be a strategic priority for the new grant and funding period 2025/2026.
- 2.7 The outcomes and impact of the funded workstreams (Parenting, perinatal mental health, infant feeding, Playing and learning together, Start for Life and Parent Voice) have been monitored and evaluated quarterly by the family hub Programme Board

and data is submitted to the DfE. A comprehensive impact report will be published by the end of March, to celebrate and evidence the achievements to date and evidence the learning and best practice on which the next year's activities will be based upon.

- 2.8 There has also been redesign work undertaken in the Family hub buildings, utilizing the capital grant element of the overall grant which has enabled more delivery space to be created and improvements in the overall condition of the buildings. This work has been done in consultation with parents and young people to ensure the spaces are welcoming and reflect the local communities' identities.
- 2.9 Relationships: Evidence is clear that identifying risks early and preventing problems from escalating leads to better long term-outcomes. Universal services should therefore prioritise working within the Family Hub partnership offer and made available to all local families who need them to identify and respond to issues early before they develop into more complex problems. Currently our targeted early help support teams are co-located within the Family hub buildings and this enables our Family Hubs to be a key enabler in delivering early help to families in Coventry who need additional support, with clear and accessible pathways to access targeted service offer and to intensive family support, as part of the emerging family help model.
- 2.10 The practice throughout the family hub offer is relationship – centered and focuses on building trusting and supportive relationships, emphasising continuity of care in the Start for Life offer. It builds on families' strengths, drawing on and improving relationships, including building networks with peers to address underlying issues. Many families attend more than one hub building, multiple activities and receive support from several of the elements of the offer both physically and virtually.
- 2.11 7 films have been made to show the work of the Family hub offer, which can be used to reach and engage other families in the support available. These include the offer to young people, the work with fathers, feeding your baby and family, and parenting.
- 2.12 Priorities for Coventry in 2025/26 will include:
- developing further the community offer and strengthening the Family hub network offer, in particularly supporting “early help hubs” in schools, and reaching those not yet accessing services from our current Family Hubs
 - building on the work with fathers, which has currently focused on supporting fathers in the first 1001 days, to ensure all services are inclusive
 - optimising on the www.coventryfamilies.co.uk portal, utilising new technology of automation and Ai to enable the most effective and efficient offer can be made available to all families in Coventry
 - further embedding the voices of parents and carers to co-produce the Family Hub offer including a volunteering pathway and qualifications

- enhancing and expanding services which seek to identify and address needs for key vulnerable groups and those experiencing inequalities including children impacted by homelessness, families with children with SEND, families from the global majority, children not actively engaged in education and those living in poverty.
- Ongoing workforce capacity and capability through workforce models that incorporate skill mix, facilitating join-up of the multi-professional workforce to provide continuity of care to all families, improving multi-agency training, addressing existing skill gaps, and ensuring empathy is at the heart of practice
- understanding what works and sharing best practice through robustly evaluating the Family Hub Offer against a set of measurable quantitative and qualitative objectives and contributing to the regional and national evaluations

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 It is recommended that Coventry continues to receive funding from the Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care to deliver its services in accordance with the national Family Hub and Start for Life Programme enabling the continued universal place based early help offer to children, young people and families.
- 3.2 A new delivery plan will be submitted by March 2025 that will demonstrate how the funding will be used to achieve the Programme objectives, which continues to be an integral component of the Early Help Strategy and the development of Family help.
- 3.3 Coventry commits to continued work with the National Centre for Family Hubs and Start for Life Unit to share learning and best practice, implement central government branding requirements and agrees to continue to take part in the national evaluation of Family Hubs and Start for Life.
- 3.4 Continued strategic commitment and support to the Programme from senior executives and leads across the Local Authority, the Integrated Care Board, elected members, and senior strategic leaders within the local services providers that are relevant to the Programme including the local health, education, and social care system, and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

4. Results of consultation undertaken

- 4.1 The establishment of a Parent Carer Panel is a statutory requirement of the Programme, and the Coventry Parent Voice Network is now an active network of over 350 parents providing feedback on the Start for Life and Family Hub offer to design, deliver and improve support and services. The Parent Voice Network has thoroughly gathered a comprehensive range of information and data to inform our services and enhance our services for families in Coventry. This process has involved extensive community engagement, structured surveys, and direct collaboration with the Department for Education.
- 4.2 One of the activities the parent network has led on has been undertaking biannual surveys with those accessing the family hubs and engaging with those who do not

through a range of outreach, community and online surveys.

- 4.3 98% of families reported high levels of satisfaction with the services and support provided by the Parent Voice Network. 80% of families stated that they feel more confident in their ability to navigate the support system and advocate for their needs. 95% of families expressed a strong sense of connection and belonging within the community, citing the Parent Voice Network as a key factor.
- 4.4 Nonusers' surveys have indicated where families may also go to seek help and advice, including schools, faith providers and other community assets. This insight has informed the development of the community outreach provision and the development of the Family hub network.

5. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 5.1 The new grant funding period will begin 1st April, 2025 following the submission of the new delivery plan in March 2025. Decisions regarding continuation, cessation or new activities funded by the current grant are currently being taken, informed by the evidence of the outcomes and impact of each Programme of work. The new Programme guide is anticipated to be made available by the end of February 2025, which will inform the continuation of current contracts and any commissioning of new projects.

6. Comments from Director of Finance and Resources and Director of Law and Governance

6.1 Financial Implications

- 6.1.1 The existing family hub model in Coventry is funded by a combination of core and grant funding, including the Supporting Families grant and contributions from Public Health. From 2025/26 Supporting Families will no longer be a separate grant and will instead form part of Coventry's Children and Families grant allocation.
- 6.1.2 Continuing to participate in the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme will attract additional grant funding of £1,583,700 in 2025/26.
- 6.1.3 This grant is not intended to cover the operational costs of family hubs and start for life services. For family hub services that are not funded as part of the Programme (as described in the Programme guide), funding from existing funding sources will need to be continued.
- 6.1.4 It is expected that two grant returns will be required throughout 2025/26:
- An interim statement of grant usage (mid-year) that will provide detail on spend to date against each strand of the Programme
 - A final statement of grant usage at the end of the financial year confirming actual spend by strand alongside confirming that expenditure was in line with the purposes specified in the grant determination letter
- 6.1.5 A full and detailed project budget will be drawn up as part of the delivery plan, against which project spend will be monitored. All required spend will be funded through the

grant awarded and no match funding will be required.

- 6.1.6 Careful consideration will need to be given to the action to be taken at the end of the grant regime, as this is time limited funding. If the grant ceases, then activity and provision will need to reduce back to levels that can be met within the existing budget envelope. However, an extension of the original three-year funding agreement by this additional year provides more opportunities to embed best practice into the existing family hub offer and into service delivery across the partnership.

6.2 Legal implications

The work of family hubs and the proposals outlined in this report supports the City Council's duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need. The duty is a general duty to provide a range and level of services to Children in Need in the LAs area and not to a specific child.

Prior to entering into the grant agreement Legal Services will review and provide the necessary advice on the legal agreement/s required to be signed to accept the funding.

Other implications

6.3 How will this contribute to the Council Plan (www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/)?

The Family Hub and Start for Life Programme supports the One Coventry Corporate Plan's vision to improve the quality of life for Coventry people by:

- Improving educational outcomes
- Making communities safer
- Improving health and wellbeing
- Protecting our most vulnerable people - Keeping children and adults safe from harm, providing early intervention for families who need it; Enabling people to exercise choice and control in their daily lives; Improving services for people experiencing domestic violence and Preventing homelessness and helping people who do become homeless
- Reducing health inequalities – giving our children the best start in life and helping support people facing multiple and complex needs.

The integration of services to support children, young people and their families is a way of delivering the Council's properties through active communities and empowering citizens and working together with partners across the voluntary, public and private sectors to

- Enable residents to self-serve by maximizing the use of new technology
- Pool and share resources
- Solve local problems

6.3.1 How does this connect with One Coventry Services Plan ?

This is an operational change Programme within the Transformation Plan 2024/25, which aims to deliver services differently by bringing them together in communities and builds on current approaches within family hubs, libraries and adult social care settings. Proposals aim to enable increased integration of a wider range of services

and deliver financial efficiencies through reducing the number of service delivery locations and thereby the costs of operating these services in terms of both property and staffing. This is a programme of work that will develop over time, and the first phase of the proposals were consulted on between 9 September 2024 and 4 November 2024, and it is anticipated that that a cabinet decision will be reached on these proposals in April 2025. This may have an impact on the use of the current Family hub buildings and how services integrate in the future to deliver the offer in the community.

6.3.2 How does this connect with Coventry Connects programme?

All Family Hub buildings are all distribution points for data sim cards to provide for those in digital poverty. They also all have free wifi and public access computers. The Family hub offer also includes a new digital portal, helping to provide access to the offer virtually as well as physically and there are ongoing developments reading using Ai and automated care pathways to enable technology to enhance the human experience and reach more families. There are also staff in Family hub buildings trained as digital champions.

6.4 How is risk being managed?

6.4.1. The possibility of a failure to identify providers to deliver on each aspect of the funded Programme is minimised as there is already Family Hubs in place with a range of agencies and service providers committed to the Programme, and a wider early help partnership offer to draw from.

6.4.2 The risks associated with possible failure to deliver on the key priorities of the Programme and the requirements of the grant are mitigated using expert personnel who are highly experienced in developing and delivering national programmes, and who will be supported and advised by personnel from the Family Hubs Start for Life Unit, DHSC.

6.5 What is the impact on the organisation?

Delivering effective prevention and early help for children and their families to secure positive outcomes is a significant priority for many functions of the City Council, including Children's Services, Safeguarding, Education, Migration, Employment and Skills and Public Health. The work of our Family Hub Programme in alignment to the National Programme specification will further improve the delivery of integrated early help and prevention services and enable impact against health inequalities outlined by the Marmot partnership.

6.6 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken in 2018 at the commencement of the Coventry Family Hub Programme.

The Family Hub and Start for Life Programme provides city wide support to children, young people and families and will enhance the work to reduce inequalities and outcomes for children, young people, and their families in need of early help. In the next year the Programme will prioritise engagement with vulnerable communities including those seldom heard or less reached including children with special

educational needs and disabilities, refugee and asylum-seeking families, families experiencing homelessness, working with fathers and supporting families living in poverty.

6.7 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

There are no implications

6.8 Implications for partner organisations?

A wide range of partner agencies (statutory, commissioned, and voluntary and community sector) take an active role in the Early Help Strategic Partnership (EHSP) and the Family Hub network. The Family Hub Programme Board, which includes senior officers from both the Children Services, Public Health and the Integrated Care Board, provides the governance for this work, as well as the EHSP, as a subgroup of the Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership. A One Coventry approach is taken by this Strategic Partnership.

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Legal : Julie Newman	Director of Law and Governance		17/02/2025	19/02/2025
Director : Sukriti Sen	Director of Children and Education Services	Children and Education Services	18/02/2025	21/02/25
Members: Councillor P Seaman	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People		18/02/2025	25/02/25

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