

Cabinet
Council

10th February 2026
24th March 2026

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Councillor P Seaman

Director approving submission of the report:

Director of Children's and Education Services

Wards affected:

All

Title: Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme Grant for April 2026 to March 2029

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 in two or more electoral wards in the City

Executive summary:

The Council currently operates 8 Family Hubs to deliver place-based integrated offers 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, covering the period April 2022 to March 2025 (first 1001 days), including financial investment to strengthen its offer to babies, children and families building on its previous achievements. The Programme was then extended for a further year, covering April 2025 to March 2026.

This Programme has already received £6m of grant funding from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Department for Education (DfE) across the 4 years 2022/23 to 2025/26 to deliver the Programme objectives. Coventry was also formally recognized 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 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. An annual review report is provided, as well as regular updates, to the Cabinet Members for Children and Young people, the Health and Wellbeing Board, and other forums on request.

Further funding has now been allocated to Coventry for financial years 2026/27 to 2028/29, with a provisional allocation of £6,117,000, subject to the Council meeting the current Programme expectations up to March 2026 and the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding to formalise the agreement to meet the new Programme expectations. Cabinet is requested to accept receipt of the grant into the local authority and associated spend, in order to deliver the Family Hub Offer in line with the Programme Guidance.

Recommendations:

Cabinet recommends that Council:

- 1) Accept the grant funding and agree planned associated spend for the purposes outlined in this report in respect of the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme for the financial years 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29.
- 2) Delegate authority to the Director of Children’s and Education Service, following consultation with the Director of Finance and Resources (S151 Officer) and the Director of Law and Governance, to enter into the necessary legal agreements to accept the funding.
- 3) Delegate the authority to the Director of Children’s and Education Service to grant funding to third parties in line with Programme expectations.
- 4) Continue to agree that future reports on this grant and the Best Start Family Hub Programme are received by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children’s Services.

Council is recommended to:

- 1) Accept the grant funding and agree planned associated spend for the purposes outlined in this report in respect of the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme for the financial years 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29.
- 2) Delegate authority to the Director of Children’s and Education Service, following consultation with the Director of Finance and Resources (S151 Officer) and the Director of Law and Governance, to enter into the necessary legal agreements to accept the funding.
- 3) Delegate the authority to the Director of Children’s and Education Service to grant funding to third parties in line with Programme expectations.
- 4) Continue to agree that future reports on this grant and the Best Start Family Hub Programme are received by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children’s Services.

List of Appendices included:

None

Background papers:

None

Other useful documents

[Family Hub and Start for Life Programme Report – Cabinet 18th March 2025](#)

[Coventry Family Hub Programme Impact report – March 2025](#)

[Giving every child the best start in life](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-year-health-plan-for-england-fit-for-the-future>

Has it or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No - However an item on this matter will be submitted to the Education and Childrens Services Scrutiny Board (2) on 26th March 2026

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

No

Will this report go to Council?

Yes – 24th March 2026

Report title: Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme Grant for April 2026 to March 2029

1. Context and background

- 1.1. 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 an increasing number of community delivery and a 24/7 digital offer.
- 1.2. 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
- 1.3. Through the Best Start in Life Strategy, HM Government have committed to making sure that every child has the best start in life and recognise that the foundations for lifelong success, health and learning are laid in early childhood. To ensure that every child has the best possible start in life, families must be supported in providing the nurturing care that children need to thrive. This support should be embedded at the heart of our communities and bring together health, education and community services to make it easier for families to access early joined up support.
- 1.4. As part of our commitments as a Marmot city to target resources to children and their families experiencing inequalities, the Family hub whilst providing universal offer to all children, also provides targeted interventions and services to children in most need, including children living in poverty. All services and groups hosted in the Family hubs are free of charge and a range of services and initiatives take place including all hubs being open as warm spaces with refreshments available for all, access to computers, data banks and access to free travel schemes. We also offer free haircuts during each school holiday, through a collaboration with a local trainer provider, and free clothing rails, food and toiletry pantries, are in each of the hub sites. There are also energy and income advice services within the hubs and drop-in sessions for families to learn how they can increase their income and save money on essentials such as food and heating. Family Hub staff also regularly work within the local Food hubs and social supermarkets promoting the offer and also support families to access their childcare and early years entitlements.
- 1.5. In July 2025 the Department for Education published “Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life” strategy that brings together early years and family services to improve child development and is backed by a funding investment over a 3-year period. This will see the progression and enhancement of Best Start Family Hubs that will continue to provide a welcoming inclusive environment that will be open to all and will prioritise support for families with babies and young children recognising the critical window for cognitive, physical and emotional development with ambitious targets as part of the governmental pledge that 75% of children aged 5 achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028.

1.6. As part of the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme, Coventry has been set ambitious local targets by DfE to increase children’s Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of the 2027/28 academic year, including:

- a) The proportion of children in Coventry City Council achieving a Good Level of Development is at least 72.3%.
- b) Disadvantaged children have benefitted at least equally from this improvement; that is, that the proportion of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieve a Good Level of Development is at least 58.3%

1.7. Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme is jointly funded by the Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care and Coventry have a 3-year provisional allocation of £6,117,000. There are clear expectations regarding how the funding should be utilised to deliver the required services, although there will be a level of flexibility across the work strands. The only exception to this flexibility is for our capital allocation, which should only be used on capital expenditure.

Table 1: Distribution of funding allocation across the relevant programme strands for financial years 2026/2027, 2027/2028 and 2028/2029

Strand	%	2026 – 27 allocation	2027 – 28 allocation	2028 – 29 allocation
Best Start Family Hubs Delivery grant - programme	22%	£516,000	£421,900	£433,300
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - capital	5%	£103,200	£105,200	£107,300
Parenting support	19%	£370,100	£374,800	£391,200
Home learning environment support	14%	£279,400	£282,800	£295,300
Perinatal mental health and parent - infant relationships	26%	£526,800	£526,800	£526,800
Infant feeding support	13%	£258,700	£258,700	£258,700
Healthy babies offers and parent and carer panels	1%	£26,600	£26,600	£26,600
Total		£2,080,800	£1,996,900	£2,039,200

N.B The allocation for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29 has been rounded to the nearest 100 pounds. The sum of the allocations across strands may not total the maximum funding allocation due to this rounding.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

2.1 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 Best Start Family Hub and Healthy Babies National Programme enabling the continued universal place based early help offer to children, young people and families.

- 2.2 The next phase of the programme has nationally been re-branded to Best Start Family Hubs with new naming conventions and requirements. To support a coherent and recognisable national offer all Local Authorities are expected to adopt consistent branding and naming practices for Best Start Family Hubs. This consistency helps families to identify and trust the support provided. As a result, rebranding will be required locally to reflect this new naming.
- 2.3 By March 2026, Coventry is required to publish its Best Start Local Plan, that will demonstrate how the funding will be used to achieve the programme objectives, and will be aligned to the Neighbourhood Health Plan where improving child development and health outcomes will be a fundamental focus of the provision of the Best Start Family Hub and Healthy Babies service delivery. This will also be in alignment with the development of Family Help within the Families First Partnership Programme.
- 2.4 Under the current Family Hub and Start for Life offer we have 8 Family Hubs. As part of the new Best Start in Life guidance, we are required to increase the number of Best Start Family Hubs. It is our intention to work collaboratively with the Voluntary and Community Service sector, Schools and Health to further expand the Best Start Family hub network. This will increase opportunities for families to access services across a wider range of locations. An example is the new Best Start Hub located at the city of Coventry Health Centre, hosted by Maternity services, UHCW and within the estate of CWPT.
- 2.5 Coventry commits to continued work with the National Centre for Family Hubs and Best Start for Life Unit to sharing and developing best practice, implementing central government branding requirements, and agrees to continue to take part in the national evaluation of Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme.
- 2.6 In the current phase of delivery, a Family Hub digital offer has been established through the creation of the single front door to services to support families, www.coventryfamilies.co.uk. It is our intention to develop this further to increase ease of access to a wider range of families and to enhance the range and scope of our digital solutions.
- 2.7 In order for the programme to be a success it is vital that there is continued Strategic commitment and support from across the partnership and the Family Hub programme board should include 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 systems, and the Voluntary, Community and Faith based Sector.
- 2.8 Further work will be developed with business and commercial partners as part of the Child Friend Cov initiative.
- 2.9 Within the programme guidance there are clear expectations around new requirements to meet the need of children and young people with SEND. In order to meet these needs funding will be allocated to support this area of work, including a new SEND practitioner role.

2.10 In line with the Programme requirements a named accountable officer for Best Start in life needs to be identified. It is recommended that the Operational Lead for Early Help carries out this function, in close collaboration with Senior Adviser Birth – 5, Early Years Quality Improvement and Standards Lead.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

3.1. 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 428 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. Timetable for implementing this decision

4.1. The new grant funding period will begin 1st April 2026 following the submission of the Best Start in Life Local plan, due to be submitted in March 2026. 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 before April 2026, which will inform the commissioning of current and new programmes of work with families.

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

5.1. Financial Implications

5.1.1 The existing Family Hub model in Coventry is funded by a combination of core and grant funding, including the Children and Families Grant and contributions from Public Health. From 2026/27, this element of the Children and Families Grant will be consolidated into a new Children, Families and Youth Grant.

5.1.2 This programme would attract additional grant funding of £6,117,000 across three financial years (2026/27 to 2028/29).

5.1.3 The Government expectation is that overall Local Authority spending on evidence-based interventions (EBIs), service delivery and universal family support will increase over the funding period, to reflect that this investment is additional to existing expenditure. The grant determination letter explicitly states that this funding should not substitute or displace existing resource for family services including early intervention and prevention and should be used to expand and deepen existing offers where they are already in place.

5.1.4 Funding beyond the 2026/27 to 2028/29 period will be subject to future Government spending review processes. Local Authorities are recommended to be considering long-term sustainability, including join up with statutory services, as they develop a local offer.

5.1.5 Our expectation is that there will be grant reporting requirements. These will be confirmed once final grant documentation has been received. Payment of funding allocations is subject to meeting the expectations of the programme. The Government reserves the right to withhold or reduce funding if Local Authorities do not meet these expectations.

5.1.6 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.

5.1.7 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 after the three years, then activity and provision will need to reduce back to levels that can be met within the existing budget envelope. However, the three-year timeframe provides an opportunity to review and measure the impact of changes to service users during the project, and to incorporate best practice into the existing family hubs model when reviewing provision and delivery.

5.2. Legal Implications

The work of Family Hubs and the proposals outlined in this report supports the 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.

6. Other implications

6.1. How will this contribute to the One Coventry Plan?

<https://www.coventry.gov.uk/strategies-plans-policies/one-coventry-plan>

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

- Improving educational outcomes
- Supporting children and families living in poverty
- 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 through “in place” co-design and collaboration

A multiagency Family Hub programme is in place and 6 multi-agency priority groups have also been established, who will focus on ensuring access to the Family Hub Offer is targeted to underrepresented groups:

- Families with children with SEND,
- Fathers
- Families from Global Majority,
- Families living in Temporary Accommodation,
- Children not accessing education or Early Years Entitlement,
- Families living in Poverty

6.2. How is risk being managed?

The possibility of a failure to identify providers to deliver on each aspect of the funded Programme is minimised as there are 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.

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 Best Start Family Hubs & Healthy Babies Programme Team DfE and DHSC.

Progress will continue to be monitored through robust governance arrangements with regular reports being received and provided.

6.3. 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.

In order to continue to deliver a successful offer to children and families in line with the Programme expectations it is intended to extend the fixed term contracts for Family hub practitioner posts and to create new roles in order to meet the new requirements.

6.4. Equalities / EIA?

An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken in 2018 at the commencement of the Coventry Family Hub Programme. The Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies 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. Over the next 3 years the Programme will build on the success of the Family Hub and Start for Life Programme and continue to prioritise engagement with vulnerable communities, 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.

6.5. Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment?

There are no implications

6.6. 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 Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme Board, which includes senior officers from Children's Services, Public Health and the Integrated Care Board, provides the governance for this oversight of this work, and a One Coventry approach is taken by this partnership.

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