

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 22 February 2024
REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Children
PORTFOLIO: Children & Young People
SUBJECT: Family Hubs Digital Solution
WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on how the Halton Family Hubs Programme is progressing in meeting the Department for Education's ambition to implement a Digital / Virtual Family Hub by March 2025

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) note the contents of the report; and**
- 2) to seek approval from the Executive Board for a Waiver request in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.(iv) and 1.14.(v) to the purchase of the Family Hub Digital Solution**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Government's 2019 Manifesto pledged to champion Family Hubs across England. In December 2020 the then Minister for Children, Vicky Ford, outlined plans to create a National Centre of Excellence for Family Hubs, funded by the Department for Education (DfE). The Best Start for Life Review: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days outlined a programme of work to ensure the best support during those crucial first 1001 days, setting babies up to maximise their potential for lifelong emotional and physical wellbeing.

The DfE and DHSC announced in April 2022 the 75 local authorities who would become pilot areas for the Family Hubs and best start in life scheme. Halton was part of this selection and since December 22 we have been working hard to develop the principles of the Family Hub Model

3.2 "Family hub" is a system-wide model of providing high-quality, joined-up, whole-family support services. Hubs deliver these services from conception, through a child's early years until they

reach the age of 19 (or 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities).

- 3.3 Family hubs aim to make a positive difference to parents, carers and their children by providing a mix of physical and virtual spaces, as well as outreach, where families can easily access non-judgmental support for the challenges they may be facing. Family Hubs will provide a universal 'front door' to families, offering a 'one-stop shop' of family support services across their social care, education, mental health and physical health needs, with a comprehensive Start for Life offer for parents and babies at its core.
- 3.4 Each family hub is bespoke to the local community it serves and should adhere to the three key delivery principles that underlie all family hubs, Access, Relationships, and Connections. Government (DHSC & DFE) have set out their expectations on delivery of family hubs which include: (1) Face to face at a family hub; (2) through the family hub but received elsewhere in the network and (3) Virtually through the family hub, including static online information and/or interactive virtual / digital service
- 3.5 The DFE Guidance references the word 'digital' 21 times and 'virtual' 43 times within their policy document,
- 3.6 Halton Family Hubs have been working with an organisation called Beebot AI over the last 5 months on a Proof of Concept (POC) to assist us in the evaluation of an Intelligent Automation Platform solution as part of our Family Hubs Digital support strategy. This was achieved through the delivery of an evaluation environment with representative digital tools, configured to demonstrate support for certain key Family Hubs support processes. The goal of the POC was to assist us in evaluating options for the use of conversational AI, robotic process automation and associated analytics delivered via a modern, intuitive, device independent progressive web/mobile application interface in support of our Family Hub initiative.
- 3.7 Beebot Family Hubs Support is a digital automation solution that delivers a digital Family Hubs experience accessible to the entire community. It consolidates all national and local content and services in an engaging way into one application in only a few clicks helping families self-serve their own support. Family Hubs Support offers a single point of access via any device, 24/7 on-demand.
- 3.8 Beebot has understood the need for a more progressive approach to unlock the full potential of the Family Hub initiative. Acting in conjunction with a council's "physical hub" services, Beebot has developed an exciting digital solution utilising conversational AI, robotic process automation and associated analytics delivered via a modern, intuitive, device independent progressive web/mobile

application interface that provides a digital “front-door” to promote and access a consolidated range of Family Hub support services.

- 3.9 As part of the Halton Council proof of concept Beebot conducted research and solution testing sessions with a diverse range of families, residents, and professionals. The group included people from all ethnic backgrounds who were at various stages in life and have different levels of education. The aim was to gain feedback and opinion from a range of demographics and job roles across Halton. 31% of parents and professionals stated that they often found it difficult to access information and services.
- 3.10 Families and professionals were given the opportunity to preview early stages of the new Family Hub Digital Solution. 42% of people stated that they never get notified or updated about new content in their area. Therefore, the feature that interested those people the most was the ‘personalised communication’ feature of the solution which involves ‘push notifications’.
- 3.11 Various research and feedback from different stakeholders inform us,
- Family Experience: Parents have told us that they don’t know what information and support is available or how to access/navigate it.
 - Accessibility: There is a lack of a consistent point for access / navigation of family services across the myriad of needs (maternity services, support for SEND, childcare, health, mental health, housing, parental support debt advice etc).
 - Engagement/reach: Activity and take up of services need to be improved, there is a desire to drive reach and engagement to ensure the right outcomes.
 - Quality: Is not always evidence-informed, consistent, up to date or engaging.
 - Analytics: “We don’t know the impact of Family Hubs initiatives”. There is a requirement to measure this, end-to-end, that requires the need to bring multiple data points together.
 - Partner Integration: Partners in the local area can take some of the pressure off Family Hubs but only if properly integrated and promoted.
 - Professional Support: The ability for a professional to easily signpost or sign up a parent or carer to services, or an automated care programme, is required.
- 3.12 As a result of a successful proof-of-concept exercise, that included extremely positive stakeholder workshop feedback and support for the solution approach from both parent and professional service providers, Beebot were asked to provide a fully costed proposal.
- 3.13 The proposal enables the council to meet and exceed its priority Annex F: Family Hub Service Expectations for the governments Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme requirements.

Our local requirements priorities will be confirmed through the implementation process

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Family hub model works alongside National Policies such as the Children's social care data and digital strategy, Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love, Children's Social Care Independent Review, Supporting Families agenda, Reducing Parental Conflict, Best Start for Life, a vision for 1001 critical days and the Healthy Child Programme 0-19.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The estimated cost of a 3 year licence is £194,000 funded through the Department for Education Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme

5.2 Waiver: In compliance with Standing Order 1.14.(iv) and 1.14.(v): Executive board approval

5.3 The provider is a specialist in delivery of this type of solution

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

Family Hubs will contribute and complement to all existing strategies and aims and objectives in improving outcomes for all children and young people and families in Halton.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

The digital solution can help to promote opportunities for children and young people that aim to improve the education, skills and employment prospects

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

The digital solution will contribute to creating a healthier community that promotes wellbeing. As part of the Beebot AI Family Hubs platform there are integrations to the NHS content. This content is updated on a regular basis by the NHS and can be available for families to access via their family hubs platform.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified at this stage

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified at this stage

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The risk in not supporting the proposal provided could result in not meeting the DFE funding and implementation timelines

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 None identified at this stage

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None identified at this stage

10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

'None under the meaning of the Act.'