

**REPORT TO:** Health & Wellbeing Board

**DATE:** 15 January 2025

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Director of Public Health

**PORTFOLIO:** Children and Young People

**SUBJECT:** Update on the progress made on the DFE & DHSC Funded Family Hub Programme

**WARD(S)** All

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To provide an update to the Health and Wellbeing Board on the progress to date in implementing the DFE & DHSC funded Family Hub Programme including a focus on perinatal mental health and parent infant relationship.

**2.0 RECOMMENDED: That**

**1) the report be noted; and**

**2) the Board approves and adopts the Halton Family Hub Perinatal Mental Health and Parent Infant Relationship Strategy.**

**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). There are three core principles of the family hub programme;

- Access
- Connection
- Relationships

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 The family hub programme guide sets out ways in which it intends services to be available to families in the following three ways:

- Face to face at a family hub
- Through the family hub but received elsewhere in the network (for example, via outreach, at a youth centre, a clinical setting such as a maternity hub, a voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisation or a faith setting)
- Virtually through the family hub, including static online information and/or interactive virtual services

3.5 Halton has launched 6 family hub sites since December 2022. These include 3 sites in Runcorn and 3 sites in Widnes. They are;

- Windmill Hill
- Brookvale
- Halton Lodge
- Kingsway
- Warrington Road
- Ditton

3.6 We are now further developing our 'network' offer which will be referred to as 'Family Hub Community' and will involve strengthening the integration and partnership arrangements amongst the voluntary sector as well as further utilising additional local authority outreach sites

3.7 On July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2024, Halton Family Hubs has launched 'Family Hub Online'. Through collaboration with Beebot AI, Family Hubs online 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 Online offers a single point of access via any device, 24/7 on-demand using conversational Artificial Intelligence, robotic process automation and data driven analytics.

3.8 As of 12<sup>th</sup> December, after only 5 months of launching, [Halton Family Hub Online](#) had seen 7,080 users, browse 13,500 sessions and accessed 114,000 pages of content. Users browse the platform for an average of 2.2 minutes. The top 5 most popular pages viewed are

- Family hubs home
- Events
- HENRY – Healthy Families
- Start for Life
- Adults

The top 5 most accessed content are

- Widnes Autumn timetable
- Runcorn Autumn timetable
- Runcorn Summer timetable
- Widnes Summer timetable
- HELPS @ Kingsway Family Hub

3.9 Ongoing developments of the platform involve

- incorporating the SEND Local Offer which will be due to go live in February
- All activities as part of Halton's Holiday Activity Fund being available to view and book through Family Hub Online
- Automated Care Pathways (digital interventions) that send automated, personalised messages of information, advice and support on a variety of different topics and themes such as perinatal mental health support for dad, advice on how to stop smoking, and information regarding childhood immunisations.
- Chat bots and bot workflows such as one that explains what the EHCP process is

3.10 Halton were awarded around £2.8m to transform services across 6 funded strands. These were

- Transformation
- Parenting
- Infant feeding
- Perinatal mental health and parent infant relationship
- Early language and Home learning environment
- Start for life and parent carer panels

3.11 Four of the funded strands had a completed 'theory of change' identifying the necessary activities and resources to achieve each step of the change process aligned to the overarching principle as per the guidance. It provided a roadmap for implementing the initiative, ensuring that activities are aligned with the overall goals.

- 3.12 **Parenting** - As part of the programme, Halton were awarded around £396,000 for the provision of an offer which will help make the transition to parenthood as smooth as possible and which stresses the importance of sensitive, responsive caregiving. This should include both universal provision and some more targeted programmes available for parents/carers with further needs. The long term change Halton wanted to see was the increase in the number of people accessing evidence based parenting support interventions so there is an improvement of parents' wellbeing and parenting skills, resulting in a reduction in requests at a higher level of need. Halton wanted to improve the access and awareness of the support needed to make the transition to parenthood as smooth as possible in order to stress the importance of sensitive, responsive caregiving
- 3.13 **Infant feeding** - As part of the programme, Halton were awarded around £504,000 to promote breastfeeding and support parents to meet their infant feeding goals. The long term change Halton wanted to see was that breastfeeding initiation and maintenance at 6-8 weeks steadily increases and that breastfeeding is practised by the majority of birthing parents in Halton. Breastfeeding data at birth, 10-14 days and 6-8 weeks has been increasing slowly over the past 10 years. However, a noticeable increase can be observed which coincides with the development and expansion of the Halton infant feeding offer through Family Hubs. Data throughout 2023 and 2024 shows a steady increase above the target of 0.5% per year at all three recorded touch points.  
Breastfeeding at birth was **50.9%** in 2022/23. So far in 2024/25 the rate at birth is **57.2%**.  
Breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks was **25.7%** in 2022/23. It is currently averaging **33.3%** in 2024/25.  
These are the highest breastfeeding rates ever recorded in Halton.
- 3.14 **Perinatal mental health and parent infant relationship** - As part of the programme, Halton were awarded around £861,000 to support parents / carers, including dads, with mild-moderate mental health needs or who would benefit from universal parent-infant support. This would allow parents to be seamlessly connected to all services set out in the expectations via their family hub. The long term change Halton wanted to see was to intervene early to reduce the risk of more severe mental health. We wanted to reduce the stigma attached to mental health for parents to open up about their feelings through wider use of a toolkit. Halton wanted to bridge the gap in services within the mid to moderate mental health arena by upskilling and improving the confidence in managing and assessing mental health as part of the family hub model.
- 3.15 There was also a requirement of the programme to produce a perinatal mental health and parent infant relationship strategy. This is part of the appendix for further discussion

3.16 **Early language and home learning environment** - As part of the programme, Halton was awarded around £209,000 to implement targeted, evidence-based interventions that train practitioners to support parents with the Home Learning Environment. The aim of this was to support educational recovery and the school readiness of children who were babies during the pandemic. The long term change Halton wanted to see was that all children develop good foundations for language and strong self esteem. We wanted to ensure that parents are confident and knowledgeable about the importance of a strong home learning environment due to there being a lack of confidence, knowledge and awareness of parents being their child's first educators.

3.17 Halton have been ambitious in its approach and as a result has received local, regional and national acknowledgement of the successes. Some of these successes include;

- November 2023 – Introduced a new service offer known as a baby shower which has now been replicated across other areas of the North West and was recently shortlisted for a national award in the partnership category
- January 2024 – Hosted a visit by the then Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Keegan MP
- September 2024 – Invited to the Jubilee Room in Parliament buildings to deliver a short talk on how Halton were using Artificial Intelligence and Intelligent Automation in its communication approach with families.
- Autumn - Presented 3 national webinars on behalf of the Local Government Association on how to adopt artificial intelligence and intelligent automation across Children's Services
- November – Presented at the national conference for family hubs in Derby on the Halton Digital Front Door Solution

3.18 Whilst the funding predominantly supports the integration of service delivery for children aged 0-5, a lot of transformative work has also been undertaken to support families with children 5-19. Some examples include;

- Integration with the Cradle to Career Right to Succeed programme in Halton Lea allowing Vibe to deliver a youth club for 3 nights per week from a local authority outreach site (Glendale, part of the Family Hub community)
- A self assessment audit compiled and completed by a group of young people at Brookvale Family Hub and Glendale to ascertain how welcoming and inclusive the environments were for young people
- Development of a community café on the site of Brookvale Family Hub, initially for one morning per week, overseen and delivered by the children and young people of Cavendish Academy High School
- Supporting the Youth Justice Service with some restorative

work at Halton Brook

#### 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The DFE recently announced a further investment for 12 months of £67m to all 75 local authority areas currently on the family hub and start for life programme.

4.2 The DHSC recently announced a further investment for 12 months of £57m to all 75 local authority areas currently on the family hub and start for life programme.

4.3 The 2024/2025 funding allocation is still to be confirmed.

#### 5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The family hub steering group have a financial sustainability plan to determine the activity that requires onward investment from future funding streams. The group will convene at the earliest opportunity to make the necessary and appropriate decisions once the funding allocation has been determined.

5.2 Any additional funding, over and above, and in line with the programme guide, will be added to a 2024/2025 delivery plan based on future priorities and needs.

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

##### 6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

Family Hubs offer vital early intervention services, including health visiting, midwifery, and infant feeding advice. This helps identify and address potential health issues early on, leading to better health outcomes for children and families.

##### 6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

Family hubs can help to break the cycle of poverty by providing support and resources to families in need. This can lead to improved educational outcomes, increased employment opportunities, and reduced reliance on social welfare programs.

##### 6.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

Family hubs provide a wide range of support services to children, young people, and families.

#### 6.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

Family hubs can identify families facing challenges early on, allowing for timely intervention and support. Family hubs can tailor their services to meet the specific needs of vulnerable families, such as those experiencing poverty, domestic abuse, or mental health issues.

#### 6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

None identified.

#### 6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

Family hubs can significantly contribute to valuing and appreciating Halton and its community by fostering a sense of belonging, pride, and shared identity. This has included hosting events like family fun days and community workshops. These events bring people together, fostering a sense of community and shared experiences.

The family hub programme has also been involving local businesses and organisations which has helped to create opportunities for collaboration and support local initiatives.

#### 7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 None identified.

#### 8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 None identified.

#### 9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Please describe any environmental and climate implications that will be generated by the recommendations or advice you are intending to present through this report. How does the recommendations of this report support the Council's response to the environment and climate emergency e.g. by promoting energy efficiency; limiting/eliminating fossil fuel use for heat, power and transport; limiting/eliminating waste and encouraging re-use of resources and encouraging procurement of local suppliers.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.