

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	20 November 2023
Subject:	Development of Integrated Family - Hubs in existing children's centres.
Lead Member:	Cllr Paul Kelly. Education and Children's Services
Chief Officer:	Sue Butcher, Chief Executive and Executive Director for Children's Services
Contact Officer:	Neil Hoskinson Associate Director for Education and Inclusion
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	YES
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES
Appendices:	<u>Appendix 1 - EqIA</u>

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out to confirm implementation of the May cabinet decision to consolidate children's centres with wider functions in three, and early years education on the other two.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1.2 Approve the establishment of a Family Hub model of delivery from the Council's retained children's centres at Penn Road, Romsey Close and Chalvey Grove Children's Centres.

Reason:

- 1.3 In the current cost of living crisis, 3.9 million children across the UK are living in poverty, and it is known that the proportion of children and young people in Slough's population is higher than national comparators. Research demonstrates that those growing up in poverty will go on to experience adversity later in life. Family Hubs can play a part in addressing this, providing support to families from conception to the age of 19 (or 25 for young people with Special Educational Needs & Difficulties (SEND)). They provide a single point of access to integrated family support services for early help. Building on the legacy of Slough's established children's centres and the service delivery model already embedded in the communities they serve; Family Hubs will further strengthen outcomes for

children and young people. Service users only having to tell their story once rather than separately to different providers is an established benefit, as is the associated reduction of their longer-term dependency on statutory services.

Commissioner Review

This report has been reviewed by Commissioners who have no specific additional comments to add.

2. Introductory

- 2.1 The decision recommended to the Cabinet, and the sequence of events that led to this point, is consistent with the Council's Corporate Plan approved in September 2023, including its purpose to close the healthy life expectancy gap by focusing on children and the strategic priority to be a borough for children and young people to thrive.
- 2.2 This report follows the Cabinet decision of 24 May 2023 which supported the recommendation to make efficiencies from children's centres where demand had been low for the services provided, or where there were suitable alternative means of service delivery.
- 2.3 The strategic context reflected evidence that the children centre services in Slough could be greatly improved by:
 - shaping the market and in building in good commissioning practice to secure best value for public money;
 - having a strategic commissioning approach allowing the private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) sectors to provide for most childcare needs in the borough;
 - consolidating services so that service provision is stronger and more sustainable in fewer centres.
- 2.4 The May report agreed by cabinet considered options in terms of various numbers of closures and retained centres, as well as the pattern of Early Years and wider children's centre usage. Its approved recommendation has provided three children's centres at Penn Road, Romsey Close and Chalvey Grove to deliver early years provision with core children's centre services for under 5's. Yew Tree Road and Monksfield Way centres continue as sites for early years provision only, with overall management from the first three centres on the "hub and spoke" model described in May.

Options considered

- 2.5 Option 1 – The Children's Centres to deliver children's centre services for children aged 0-5 years alongside delivery of early years provision in Penn Road, Romney Close and Chalvey Grove, with early years provision only in Yew Tree Road and Monksfield Way. This is the current operating model, **not recommended** on the basis that it would miss the opportunities arising from option 2 (below).
- 2.6 Option 2 – To develop a Family Hub model for children aged 0-19 years (0-25 years for children with SEND) in conjunction with partners, utilising existing children's centres at Penn Road, Romsey Close and Chalvey Grove (**Recommended option**).

2.7 Option 3 – To identify/ utilise other premises in Slough to develop a Family Hub model. Alternative premises would need to be found, funded and developed, where those in Option 2 represent a very practical way forward.

3. Background

3.1. National context

- 3.1.1. In May 2022 the independent review on children’s social care (McAllister Review), published a report recommending wide ranging reforms to children’s social care, redefining family support, shifting services into local community-based multi-disciplinary teams.
- 3.1.2. A further announcement had been made in May 2021 by the Education Secretary, to announce that the Anna Freud Centre will facilitate the National Centre of Excellence, whose role is to be a champion for Family Hubs, spreading best practice and evidence on integrated family service models and work with areas to help them set up and deliver world-leading models of support for families from conception to nineteen.
- 3.1.3. The vision set out by the Minister for Children has been further endorsed by the Department of Health and Social Care’s (DHSC) Early Years Healthy Development Review, which recommended the nationwide development of Family Hubs. This vision endorsed the development of Family Hubs to be welcoming, family-focused centres for every new family through pregnancy and beyond.
- 3.1.4. Effective integrated working along with Early Help services can improve children’s wellbeing, educational attainment and life chances, reduce family poverty, improve mental health and lead to lower crime, unemployment and other negative outcomes which carry significant cost to the public purse. The integrated Family Hub model enables easier access to support, better outcomes for families, more effective service.

3.2. Local Context

- 3.2.1. Slough’s Early Help Strategy 2023 informs us that Families themselves also tell us that it can be challenging to navigate their way around the help and support available. They can find themselves ‘re-telling their story’ to different professionals. This can sometimes prevent children and families getting the right information, advice, guidance and help at the right time.
- 3.2.2. The Early Help strategy also outlines the evidence that a child’s parent is their primary educator, but some parents need more help to develop the home environment and parent-to-child relationships. This can impact on a child’s early development, so there is a strong financial case for providing Early Help at this age to prevent later more costly support.
- 3.2.3. Evidence shows that a child’s experiences from conception to five play a critical role in their development, and that the early years represent an opportunity for families to benefit longer term. We know that measurable gaps in outcomes, between disadvantaged and vulnerable children and their

peers, can emerge early before children are two years of age. These are difficult and costly to close.

- 3.2.4. Some families need extra help and support to enable them to be independent longer term, but children, young people and families have said they don't want to be "in systems". They want to be supported by people they trust, their friends and families, their community to resolve the day-to-day challenges they face.

3.3. *Development of retained centres as Family Hubs*

- 3.3.1. A family hub is a focus for system-wide models of providing high-quality, whole-family, joined up family support services. Family Hubs deliver these family support services from pregnancy, through the child's early years and later childhood, and into early adulthood until they reach the age of 19 (or up to 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities).
- 3.3.2. Each family hub will be bespoke to the community/locality it serves. The three children's centres currently delivering core children's centres services for children under 5 are at Penn Road, Chalvey Grove and Romsey Close Children's Centres. They are best placed for the development of family hubs and for whole-family work as the sites are well known in Slough, non-stigmatising and of good quality. It will be important to protect some space and services within Family Hubs to meet the needs of very young children (e.g. for ante/post-natal services, child and family health services, early education and child development and parenting support) They have been designed to ensure that the youngest children's needs can be met (e.g. in bathrooms, window heights, access to outdoor space, security), as well as needs of other key communities of interest such as families with disabilities/additional needs. These plans seek to avoid any risk of capital clawback which might occur on a reducing scale as a percentage of capital spent on the buildings, unless similar services for young children and their families are offered – which they will be.
- 3.3.3. This universal early years provision enables the identification of emerging difficulties at the earliest stage. Until children start formal schooling there is no other universal early years information base of families with young children. So, the proposal greatly reduces the risk of 'unknown' young children and unidentified safeguarding concerns.
- 3.3.4. The detailed development of a specified family hub model cannot be dictated at this stage. It will grow according to local needs and an established pattern that must be adhered to by working to the core principles outlined by the DfE; these are:
- Early Years excellence – The hub recognises the importance of this period and prioritises the need to support parents to ensure children have the best start in life;
 - Families with Children 0-19 (to 25, with SEND);
 - Early Help and Prevention;
 - Integrated work;
 - Whole family approach;
 - Easily accessible;
 - Partnerships with voluntary sector, and;

- embedded within the community.
- 3.3.5. Multi – disciplinary and multi-agency teams will work together closely and in a co-ordinated way, through co-location in the centres. They will support families to get the help they need in the community they live in.
- 3.3.6. There will be a clear and simple way for families with all ages to access support. Teams will work closely together in a co-ordinated way with shared outcomes and clear governance, sharing data to inform decisions and supporting families to only have to “tell their story once”. For families there will be a consistent public-facing point of access with improved relationships and customer experience.
- 3.3.7. Development of an effective multi agency Family Hub Board at this stage, will develop shared ownership, clear governance, and implementation of the family hub strategy, embedding this vision at a strategic level. Governance structures will enable different agencies to take collective responsibility, share risks and jointly invest in early help, whole-family and whole-system working.
- 3.4. *What will they do*
- 3.4.1. They will aim to drive improvement around family outcomes – by improving family relationships, stability, physical health, and mental wellbeing. This will support outcomes for children and young people across the four domains of development: physical; intellectual; social; emotional & behavioural.
- 3.4.2. These services will support families with the aim to reduce disparities between disadvantaged families and their peers and deliver on Slough’s corporate plan objectives: “a borough for children and young people to thrive”.
- 3.5. *Who will benefit from a Family Hub*
- 3.5.1 Families, children, and young people – there will be better access to early help services, improved relationships with professionals, better experiences of navigating services thus improving engagement and in turn outcomes.
- 3.5.2 Professionals – Enhanced working through inter-professional collaboration, improved relationships with families, better outcomes, shared sustained approach and more productive outcomes through co-location.
- 3.5.3 Local authority – Clearer or shared funding arrangements, improved needs assessment, a clear vision with outcomes and better governance, better management of statutory pressures and reduced wait times for early interventions.

4 Implications of the Recommendation

4.1. Financial implications

- 4.1.1. The recommended option in the report is to change the way we use the reduced number of Children’s Centres, particularly in terms of how professional teams work together. Those centres are currently operational. Therefore, there are no financial cost implications from pursuing the recommended option.

4.2. *Legal implications*

- 4.2.1. Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 (“the 2004 Act”) imposes an obligation on the council to plan to promote co-operation between the council, its relevant partners, and any other persons or bodies who exercise functions or are engaged in activities relating to children in the local authority’s area, as the council considers appropriate. These arrangements are to be made with a view to improving the well-being of children in the local authority’s area.
- 4.2.2. S.11(2) of the 2004 Act provides that the council must plan with partner agencies for ensuring that their functions are discharged “having regard to the need to safeguard and protect the welfare of children”. In discharging that duty, they must have regard to any guidance given to them for the purpose by the Secretary of State. The relevant guidance is the “Working Together to Safeguard Children”.
- 4.2.3. The obligations under the 2004 Act concern children of all ages. The statutory obligations in the Childcare Act 2006 (“the 2006 Act”) concern “young children”, which essentially are those aged between 0-5. Section 1 of the 2006 Act imposes on local authorities a general duty in relation to the well-being of young children to:
- a) improve the well-being of young children in their area, and
 - b) reduce inequalities between young children in their area in relation to:
 - physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
 - protection from harm and neglect;
 - education, training and recreations;
 - the contribution made by them to society; and
 - their social and economic well-being.
- 4.2.4. S.3 of the 2006 Act sets out specific duties the council has in relation to early childhood services which include early years provision. It provides that the council must plan to secure that early childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner which is calculated to facilitate access to those services, and maximise the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children. In discharging its duties, the council must have regard to any guidance given from time to time by the Secretary of State.
- 4.2.5. Under s.2B of the National Health Service Act 2006, the council has a duty to take such steps as it considers appropriate for improving the health of the people in its area. Such steps include provision of services or facilities designed to promote healthy living and provision of information and advice. Integrated and effective early help services for children and families support both of these overarching public health duties.

4.3. *Risk management implications*

	Risks	Potential Impact	Mitigating Actions
1	Failure to agree proposals for Family Hubs	Lost benefit of integrated family-focused work / further pressure on statutory services.	Professional change management processes compliant with national requirements

2	Failure to secure stakeholder support for proposals	Implications for mutual trust, and impact in placements and costs	Early dialogue and developments based on mutual professional respect
3	Failure to secure parents' trust and confidence in planning support for families	Lack of engagement and lost opportunities for early intervention; staff morale	Positively engage existing partnership systems
4	Early Years Sufficiency not met	Dissatisfied families and children's developmental needs not met	Implement report proposals
5	Continuation of current model of children's centres	Identified gaps for services for children young people over 5 increases and pressures are increased in other areas	Planning and identification of need
6	Increased cost to the council and partners identifying other premises than children's centres for family hubs.	Lack of community engagement and time needed to establish belonging in the community could affect implementation. Lack of available space already an factor for partners and service delivery now.	Children's centre buildings already established and trusted within the community

4.4. Environmental implications

4.4.1. There are no environmental implications.

4.5. Equality implications

4.5.1. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires that public bodies when exercising functions have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between those with protected characteristics and those without and foster good relations between those with protected characteristics and those without. Appendix 1 contains an equality impact assessment for the family hub model. This assessment confirms that it is anticipated that all disadvantaged groups including those with protected characteristics within the target demographic of 0 – 19 year olds and up to 25 year olds with special educational needs and disabilities and their families will benefit by the changes referenced in the options. This is because the modified service will seek to improve the identification and targeting of family support to those most in need with a view to improving outcomes for young children and their families and reducing inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers whilst also streamlining aspects of services currently provided.

5. Background Papers

5.1. None