

## Cabinet

<b>Report Title</b>	Recommissioning of Family Hubs
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Wednesday 10 September 2025
<b>Report Author</b>	Senior Commissioning Manager – Family Help Maxine Burrows
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Executive Director of Children and Education Services Sally Giles
<b>Lead Cabinet Member(s)</b>	Cabinet Member for Children and Families Councillor Jalal Uddin
<b>Why is this a key decision?</b>	1. Expenditure over £1 Million+                      yes 2. Significant impact on 2 or more wards              yes
<b>Wards Affected</b>	All (All Wards);
<b>Identify exempt information and exemption category</b>	Choose an item.
<b>Is the report urgent?</b>	No.
<b>Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)</b>	
<b>Appendices (if any)</b>	

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to recommission a Core Family Hubs Service as part of the key Family Hub Programme that delivers against several key corporate objectives and outcomes.

### 2. Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children and Education Services in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Transformation and the Monitoring Officer, Service Director of Governance be to award of new contracts for the provision of Family Hub Services for a period of 3 years from 1 April 2026 (with the option to extend for 2 years);
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer, Service Director of Governance to enter into or execute, under seal if necessary, any related documentation in

connection with the land and property as part of the Family Hub service on terms and conditions agreed by the Executive Director of Children's Services;

- 2.3 Approve Variations to the Contract up to a value of £400k per annum, should they be necessitated, for the delivery of additional activity funded via the Best Start Family Hubs grant and that authority to approve such Variations be delegated to the appropriate Chief Officer in consultation with the relevant Cabinet member;
- 2.4 Approve Variations to the Contract up to a value of £100k per annum, should they be necessitated, for the delivery of additional preventative activity funded via the social care prevention grant and that authority to approve such Variations be delegated to the appropriate Chief Officer in consultation with the relevant Cabinet member; and
- 2.5 Approve an exemption be authorised under rule 8.10 of the Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules 2024 to allow a contract to be awarded to the successful tenderer if the required number of tenders are not received as we will be advertising widely to the market and it is reasonable to assume all interested parties will have the opportunity to bid.

### **3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendation**

- 3.1. The current contract for the delivery of Family Hubs (previously known as Children's Centres) is due to end on the 31 March 2026. The current contract was awarded in December 2021 to commence delivery on 1st April 2022 for 3 years and extended for a further 12 months to 31st March 2025.
- 3.2. Sure Start was announced in 1998 by the then government, with a focus on improving support for young children and their families in deprived areas. Initially, Sure Start was targeted at the 20% poorest areas in England and aimed to provide support through local programs. These programs included a range of services like healthcare, early education, and childcare. Over time, Sure Start evolved into a more universal service, with the development of Sure Start Children's Centres offering integrated services to all families with young children. From 2010, funding for Children's Centres was cut significantly by government with over 1340 centres closing nationally.
- 3.3. Sandwell Council took the significant decision to maintain Children's Centres, as far as possible, using general fund money, recognising the positive impact that they had on communities.
- 3.4. A study by the Institute of Fiscal Studies in 2024 showed Sure Start, and the subsequent Children's Centres, had a significant positive impact on communities, families and children that accessed them:
  - Children who lived within a short distance (2.5 kilometres) of a Sure Start centre for their first five years performed 0.8 grades better in their GCSEs.

- By the time they took their GCSEs, effects were six times higher for those eligible for free school meals than for those not eligible for them.
  - Access to a nearby Sure Start centre at early ages increased the likelihood of children being recorded as having a special educational need or disability (SEND) at age 5 but significantly decreased the proportion of children recorded as having a SEND at ages 11 and 16 by 3%. By age 16, the probability of having an Education, Health and Care Plan decreased by 9%.
- 3.5. In 2021 the Government announced that it would be providing funding for the provision of 'Family Hubs', the programme was extended for a further year through to the end of March 2026. For areas that still had Children Centres, the funding was to strengthen and extend their offer.
- 3.6. Sandwell was awarded £3.8m for the delivery of Family Hubs and Start to Life over a three-year period from Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care. The programme's core objective was to improve the universal Start for Life offer and transform the delivery of family services in 75 local authority areas with the highest levels of deprivation and disproportionately poor health and educational outcomes.
- 3.7. Approximately £900k of this funding was used to enhance service delivery within Children's Centres through the existing contract and improve the reach of the centres. Children's Centres were rebranded as Family Hubs in July 2023, which was a key requirement of the funding.
- 3.8. As part of the spending review in June 2025 the Government announced that it would be rolling out the Family Hubs programme nationally and that funding would be provided for each year of the spending review period.
- 3.9. The Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care will have not yet confirmed how much funding will be provided to each Council, it is expected that funding will be in line existing levels.
- 3.10. Given the previous decision to maintain Children's Centres, Sandwell has been able to roll out the delivery of the additional activities required by Family Hubs at pace. This has included improvements against six key themes:
- Infant Feeding,
  - Perinatal Mental Health and Parent Infant Relationships
  - Parenting
  - Home learning and Early Language
  - Start for life
  - Parent Carer Panels
- 3.11. A needs assessment was completed in September 2023 for each of Sandwell's towns, this included data from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment produced by Public Health. This needs assessment considered the areas where Sandwell performed poorly, the geographical spread of

services and the key presenting issues for families in completed Early Help Assessments. The findings from the needs assessment along with the Start for Life element of the programme which focuses on the first 1001 critical days aligns with many areas within the early years Public Health Framework. This framework focuses on improving the health and well-being of children from conception to age 5, encompassing physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development.

3.12. The needs assessment identified several areas of concern:

- Significant number of children living in low-income families
- A percentage of children achieving a good level of development at reception lower than the national average
- A high number of pregnant women who are smoking at time of delivery
- Low breast-feeding prevalence at 6 – 8 weeks
- High infant mortality
- Low Birth weight
- Poor oral health
- Year six prevalence of Obesity

3.13. The five most prevalent presenting issues on Early Help Assessments were:

- Parenting Support – 76%
- Child Mental Health – 52%
- Adult Mental Health – 41%
- Adult workless – 29%
- Less than 90% school attendance – 27%

3.14. In addition, the needs assessment highlighted that more needed to be done to reach newly arrived families, young parents, fathers and male carers. The Family Hub model is working closely with Public Health, Health, Education and Social Care to reduce needs, intervening early at the right time to provide families with the most appropriate support.

3.15. In 2024, a Perinatal Mental Health and Parent Infant Relationship Needs Assessment was completed with Public Health and a range of partners. The report identified that migrant women faced barriers in accessing support. The Family Hubs in partnership with Brushstrokes are now co-producing a range of resources in collaboration with migrant women to reduce these barriers.

### **Outcomes**

3.16. Family Hubs have been able to demonstrate a positive impact on families in Sandwell:

- The Family Hub model has increased its reach (babies, children and parents) by 47% since 2023.
- 500 early interventions via WELLCOMM and watchful eye documents have been delivered in the last 12 months. On average a third of children show 'good improvement' at their Wellcomm rescreen.

- The number of under-fives supported by the Inclusion Support Early Years Service has increased since 2023 by 42%, demonstrating improvement in early identification.
- The number of parents accessing programmes from 2023 to 2025 has tripled.
- Breast feeding prevalence at 6 – 8 weeks has improved by 10%

### **Delivery**

- 3.17. In Sandwell there is a Family Hub each town (table 1), this ensures there is availability of provision across the borough. These hubs provide the main base for staffing as well as providing facilities to run sessions and groups for families. In addition to the hubs in each town, to ensure that families are readily able to access services there are further 'spokes' across the borough (Table 2).
- 3.18. Six of these spokes are included within the main Family Hubs contract and will be delivered by the successful provider. A further four spokes are funded via the Family hubs grant and are commissioned separately. This arrangement will be maintained in the new contract.

**Table 1**

<b>Name of centre</b>	<b>Address</b>
Oldbury Family Hub	Tividale Street Burnt Tree
Smethwick Family Hub	Corbett Street Smethwick
Rowley Regis Family Hub	Dudley Road Rowley Regis
Tipton Family Hub	Ridgeway Road Tipton
Wednesbury Family Hub	Dorsett Road Wednesbury
West Bromwich Central Family Hub	Off Claypit Lane West Bromwich

**Table 2**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Operator</b>
Galton Valley (Smethwick)	Part of the tender
Happy Faces (Rowley Regis)	Part of the tender
Flying Start (Cradley Heath)	Part of the tender
Wednesbury North	Part of the tender
Great Bridge	Part of the tender
West Bromwich North	Part of the tender
Ferndale Spoke (Great Barr)	Ferndale Primary School
Harvills Hawthorn Spoke (West Bromwich)	Harvills Hawthorne Primary School

Cradley Community Centre Spoke (Cradley Heath)	Cradley Heath Community Link
New Beginnings (Smethwick Spoke)	New Beginnings

### 3.19 Services provided by Family Hubs

Start for Life	Start for Life programme is well-placed to deliver this joined-up holistic care by providing accessible, integrated maternity, baby and family support services through the first 1,001 days of life and beyond. All expectant and new parents in Sandwell receive a Start for Life magazine detailing the offer, it's also available digitally and can be translated into over 100 different languages and read out loud if needed. There is a start for life team that contacts families during the antenatal period and on arrival of the new baby to promote the services and support available.
Parenting	Family Hubs provide a wide range of programmes and workshops for parents and carers to support their parenting journey. This workstream also includes the provision of Antenatal Programmes, which are delivered in partnership with health to prepare parents for delivery and arrival of baby.
Early Years Services	This includes a range of sessions, including stay and plays, SEND support, Language Groups, Early Literacy Programmes including REAL and Play Talk Read, school readiness, support to improve home learning environment and early interventions such as WELLCOMM Assessments
Family Support	The Family Support team provide targeted support to families across universal, additional and specialist.
Perinatal Mental Health and Parent Infant Relationships	The offer includes targeted parent support, wellbeing activities and programmes to strengthen parent and infant relationships such as baby massage and baby clubs.
Infant Feeding	There is specialist support for infant feeding available from our Health Visiting teams, Breast Feeding Network and a Breast Pump Loan Service facilitated by the Family Hubs

### 3.20 Additional Services

- Information, advice and guidance connecting families to services and support
- Welfare Rights support delivered through Sandwell Consortium
- Access to Health Services through joint working with Midwifery and Health Visiting to provide Antenatal and Baby Clinics.

- Childcare on site (in 5/6 core centres) operated by third parties.

## **Contract**

- 3.21 Previously the Family Hubs contract was split into 3 lots, based on two towns in each lot. This has meant that providers were able to submit a tender for one or more lots and the potential for there to be three different providers being successful and the associated risk of differential services being delivered across different towns.
- 3.22 The contract to commence in April 2026 will be procured as a single lot, this will ensure that services delivered by the Family Hubs across Sandwell will be consistent, additionally having a single provider will increase the likelihood of reduced management and overhead costs.
- 3.23 The successful provider will be required to submit quarterly monitoring against the service specification. This will include quarterly monitoring meetings with the commissioner supported by a multi-agency panel. A summary of the monitoring will be shared at Family Help board.
- 3.24 Family Hubs will be led within the Children's and Education Directorate but will be delivered as a One Council One Team programme including Public Health and Sandwell Children's Trust.

## **4. Alternative Options Considered**

- 4.1. **Option 1 - Extension of contracts.** There is no option to further extend existing contracts as this is not available within the existing contract terms and not compliant with procurement regulations.
- 4.2. **Option 2 - Shorten the length of contracts offered to two years.** It would be possible to go out to tender based on a shorter contract period for example two years. This would allow the matter to be considered in two years' time. This course of action however is likely to have a negative impact on the number of agencies bidding for the contracts and have an impact on staff retention as they look for more permanent positions.
- 4.3. **Option 3 - Bring the service in-house.** An alternative solution would be to bring the operation of core Children's Centres into the local authority. This would require the TUPE transfer of existing staff that meet the TUPE requirements into the local authority. This would be time consuming and costly. Local Authority staffing costs are usually significantly higher than those in the voluntary sector.

## **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 All Family Hubs hold quarterly forums for parents and carers to share their views on the services and support delivered. This is shared across operational groups and a summary shared at Family Help board, ensuring that their views are heard and responded to.
- 5.2 A focus group with parents was held in a community setting in May 2025 to understand the needs of families.
- 5.3 A multi-agency focus group with a range of professionals including education, Health, Public Health and ISSEY team to review the current Family Hub offer.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1. The maximum amount of revenue funding for the operation of the hubs would be £2,725,619 per annum. The maximum contract value over 5 years would be £13,628,095. The annual allocation and overall contract allocation has been assessed and demonstrated as affordable and capable of being contained within existing revenue budgets for children's services.
- 6.2. The staff of centres are employed primarily by the current lead agencies of the service. Where applicable those staff will have TUPE rights of transfer to the successful bidder organisation. These are issues that would be resolved between the existing employer and the successful agency.
- 6.3. The Government have announced that Best Start Family Hubs funding will continue over the spending review period, the amount of funding has not been confirmed. Sandwell received £1,619,700 in 2025/06. It is expected that once funding is confirmed the contract will need to be varied to include additional activities as part of this programme.
- 6.4. As part of the national reforms to family help and safeguarding the government has provided additional funding to local authorities via the Social Care Prevention Grant. It is expected that some of this funding will be used to fund new preventative services, should any of these new services align with the delivery of the core family hubs, the contract with the successful provider may need to be varied to incorporate additional funded activity.

## **7. Legal and Governance Implications**

- 7.1. S.5A of the Childcare Act 2006 states that local authorities must make arrangements, as far as practicable, for 'sufficient provision Children's Centres to meet local needs'.
- 7.2. Legal Services and Procurement will provide support during the procurement process to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023, the Council's Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. If



the Council is successful in obtaining additional grant funding, legal support will include advising on variation to the service agreement.

- 7.3. A standard lease will form part of the tender pack. Successful agencies would need to agree to those leases as part of the application process.

## **8. Risks**

- 8.1. The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with – to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision / project. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks. Based on the information provided, it is the officers' opinion that no significant risks have been identified.
- 8.2. There is always a risk that there will be a limited number of agencies coming forward to bid but given the involvement of a number of agencies previously the risk is seen to be low. Agencies will be duly notified when the tender is released.
- 8.3. If the report is not approved as scheduled it will negatively impact on the timescales for completion of the tender process. That in turn could lead to problems with the transition process between providers. Enter your text here.

## **9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)**

- 9.1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) initial screening has been undertaken. The screening identified that there will be no adverse impact on people or groups with protected characteristics. The proposal will seek to maintain the current arrangements for the delivery of consistent services across the borough. A full EIA has been completed.

## **10. Social Value**

- 10.1. Providers enhance the community aspect of the Family Hub model. This includes outreach support in the community.
- 10.2. Family Hubs have a good record of recruiting staff locally and there have been a steady flow of parents developing their knowledge and skills so that they have been able to take up posts within the service.

## **11. Corporate Parenting**

- 11.1. Family Hubs provide support to care leavers and care experienced, working closely with the Childrens Trust and care leavers team. We also provide care leavers that become parents with baby bundles based on their needs.

## 12. Background Documents

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-hubs-and-start-for-life-programme-local-authority-guide>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/giving-every-child-the-best-start-in-life>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-outcomes-framework-call-for-feedback>
- <https://www.gov.uk/missions>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-year-health-plan-for-england-fit-for-the-future>

## 13. How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?

- 13.1. **Growing Up in Sandwell** - Family Hubs provide a central point for the local delivery of services and support for families in Sandwell. They provide a wide range of services for families from conception, babies and children aged up to 19 (or 25 with SEND). Family Hubs are well established and provide universal and community family help, offering help and support to families on a wide range of issues. The offer includes parenting, antenatal support, early language interventions and perinatal mental health support. Family Hubs are a key partner in our journey to achieve Child Friendly Sandwell.
- 13.2. **Living in Sandwell** - The Family Hub model includes 6 family hubs, 4 spokes, 6 satellite spokes and a mobile spoke which helps to ensure that families, regardless of where they live can access support, information and help at the earliest point. The mobile spoke connects families living in temporary accommodation (hotels) to services and support.
- 13.3. **Thriving Economy in Sandwell** – Our family hubs have a strong volunteering element. In a typical 12 months, over 100 volunteers provide 6500 hours, support over 2000 sessions equivalent to £76,000. On average 25% of volunteers are successful in gaining employment.
- 13.4. **Healthy in Sandwell** – Family Hubs work collaboratively with health visiting and midwifery, facilitating antenatal and baby clinics in all hubs. Family hubs work closely with Oral Health ensuring the workforce are aware of its importance and how to promote the key messages. There is strong focus on perinatal mental health and parent infant relationships; interventions include one to one support, baby groups and specialist parenting. The Hubs provide Infant feeding support and an equipment loan service support breast feeding across the borough.

Family Hubs work closely with Public Health to ensure that key messages and campaigns are supported and promoted. The model includes specialist support from CAMHS, addiction services and SEND support.

- 13.5. **One Council One Team** – Family Hubs provides a space for Council teams and Childrens Trust colleagues to be based within the community. This currently includes Housing, Go Play, Youth Service, employment advisors, Inclusion Support Early Years, and sensory support teachers.

**Relevance Check****Budget Reduction/Service Area:****Service Lead****Date:**

In what ways does this Budget reduction have an impact on an outward facing service? How will the service feel different to your customers or potential customers?

N/A

If not, how does it impact on staff e.g. redundancies, pay grades, working conditions? Why are you confident that these staff changes will not affect the service that you provide?

N/A

Is a Customer Impact Assessment needed? No