

Cabinet

Report Title	Acceptance of Family Hub grant funding				
Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 11 March 2026				
Report Author	Maxine Burrows				
Lead Officer	Executive Director Children and Education				
Lead Cabinet Member(s)	Cabinet Member for Children & Families				
Why is this a key decision?	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>1. Expenditure over £1 Million+</td> <td>yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Significant impact on 2 or more wards</td> <td>yes</td> </tr> </table>	1. Expenditure over £1 Million+	yes	2. Significant impact on 2 or more wards	yes
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2. Significant impact on 2 or more wards	yes				
Wards Affected	(All Wards);				
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Open				
Is the report urgent?	No				
Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)	N/A				
Appendices (if any)	1. Funding Letter from the DfE and DHSC with details of grant including a breakdown across workstreams				

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to accept a three- year grant funding award from the Department for Education (DfE) and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) totalling £6,682,000 which will be used to support and enhance delivery of the Family Hub programme across all communities in Sandwell.

2. Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Children and Education to accept a three-year grant funding award from the Department for Education (DfE) and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) totalling £6,682,000 and agree, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, planned associated expenditure for the financial years 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29;
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Children and Education, following consultation with the Executive Director for Finance and Transformation (S151 Officer) and the Service Director for Governance (Monitoring Officer), to enter into the necessary legal agreements to accept the three-year grant funding award and to enter into any contract arrangements associated with the agreed expenditure plan;

3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 In 2022 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. The Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care extended the grant in December 2024 for a further 12 months, April 2025 to March 2026.
- 3.3 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:
 - 3.3.1 Infant Feeding
 - 3.3.2 Perinatal Mental Health and Parent Infant Relationships
 - 3.3.3 Parenting
 - 3.3.4 Home learning and Early Language
 - 3.3.5 Start for life
 - 3.3.6 Parent Carer Panels

Outcomes

- 3.4 Family Hubs have been able to demonstrate a positive impact on families in Sandwell:
 - 3.4.1 The Family Hub model has increased its reach (babies, children and parents) by 47% since 2023.
 - 3.4.2 500 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.

- 3.4.3 The number of under-fives supported by the ISSEY has increased since 2023 by 42%, demonstrating improvement in early identification.
- 3.4.4 The number of parents accessing programmes from 2023 to 2025 has tripled.
- 3.4.5 Breast feeding prevalence at 6 – 8 weeks has improved by 10%
- 3.4.6 Relationships with partners across the system has strengthened.

Delivery

- 3.5 In Sandwell there is a core Family Hubs each town. The core hubs provide the main base for staffing as well as providing facilities to run sessions and groups for families.
- 3.6 In addition to the core centres in each town there are 10 spokes within the model. The spokes ensure that services are accessible across Sandwell for families who are at a distance from the core centres. It is proposed that this arrangement will be maintained in the new contract.

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The following alternative options were considered –
 - 4.1.1 **Option 1 – Decline the funding.** This would not enable us to continue to develop and strengthen the Family Hubs programme. This option was therefore dismissed.
 - 4.1.2 **Option 2 – Accept the funding.** This option will support delivery of a range of initiatives involving over 40 partner agencies and will ensure hard to reach and key groups can be reached in a consistent, inclusive and supportive manner. This option is supported and forms the basis of this report.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Several informal consultation meetings have been held involving representatives from families, libraries, the voluntary sector, public health, youth, Early Years and health. Further stakeholder engagement will continue, with all feedback used to inform a programme of continuous reflection and improvement.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 A breakdown of the grant funding is as follows:

Strand	%	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant – programme	23%	£569,400	£465,600	£478,100
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant – capital	5%	£113,900	£116,100	£118,400
Parenting support	20%	£434,500	£439,900	£459,200

Home learning environment support	15%	£323,800	£327,800	£342,200
Perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships	24%	£540,800	£540,800	£540,800
Infant Feeding Support	12%	£263,600	£263,600	£263,600
Healthy babies offers and parent and carer panels	1%	£26,700	£26,700	£26,700
Total		£2,272,500	£2,180,400	£2,228,900

6.2 The council's core budget funds £2,730,000 costs per annum associated with the Family Hubs service. In addition to that, the council receives Family Hubs grant funding.

6.3 The Family Hub grant from DfE and DHSC will provide an additional income across 3 years as follows. It should be noted that the existing grant funding in 2025/26 is £1,619,700, so the 2026/27 allocation represents an increase in grant funding to the council of £652,800.

Grant	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£2,272,500	£2,180,400	£2,228,900

6.4 The existing Family Hub model in Sandwell is funded by a combination of core and grant funding. From 2026/27, this element of the Children and Families Grant will be consolidated into a new Children, Families and Youth Grant.

6.5 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.

6.6 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.

6.7 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.

6.8 It is expected 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.

6.9 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.

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.

- 6.10 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.

7. Legal and Governance Implications

- 7.1 The work of the 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.
- 7.2 Legal Services will review the grant agreement and provide the necessary advice on the legal agreement/s required to be signed to accept the funding.

8. Risks

There is a risk of clawback if we do not spend the full grant. This is mitigated by regular review of delivery and budgets with actions being taken to reduce the risk of underspends or delivery that is outside of the scope of the grant

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

- 9.1 A screening assessment has been undertaken and the proposed activities to be funded are designed to provide inclusive support and target additional positive interventions aligned with protected characteristics as needed.

10. Other Relevant Implications

11. Background Documents

- 11.1 Not applicable.

12. How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?

- 12.1 This report will support the delivery of the following Strategic Themes:-

12.1.1 **Growing Up in Sandwell** – The funding will support a range of initiatives that support children and young people directly and indirectly including through the home learning environment, school readiness programmes, support programmes for parents and wider workshops and activities for parents and families.

12.1.2 **Living in Sandwell** – the funding will help support access to information, support and resources across the Family Hub Model.

- 12.1.3 **Healthy in Sandwell** – the funding will support a range of initiatives for healthy living including infant feeding support, antenatal programmes, health visiting and midwifery clinics delivered across the Family Hubs and mental health support.
- 12.1.4 **Thriving Economy in Sandwell** – the funding will help support work to make welfare and benefit advice available using the Family Hub model, together with volunteering programmes and access to employment advice and support.
- 12.1.5 **One Council One Team Approach** – the funding will support the work of the multi-agency operational group to ensure plans are co-ordinated and further enforce the work of over 40 partners who work across and with the Family Hubs.