

Report to CABINET

Improving our Services for Children, Young People and their Families

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People

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Reason for Decision

To seek approval to remodel the delivery of services for young children and families creating seven new Family Hubs, delivering increased outreach into communities and an enhanced digital offer.

Public consultation on these proposals took place between 6 December 2023 and 31 January 2024.

Summary

The Council is transforming its offer to families through the £3.6m Oldham Family Hubs programme. The programme will provide easily accessible places in local communities which will provide families with children and young people aged 0-19 (up to 25 if there are special educational needs and disabilities) with early help to overcome difficulties and build stronger relationships. The Family Hubs programme is acting as a catalyst for the proposed wider remodeling and improvement of services for children and families in Oldham around 7 new Family Hubs. These proposals were the subject of a public consultation that ran from 6 December 2023 to 31 January 2024.

The proposed remodel of the service includes:

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- Transforming 6 currently designated children's centres into new, better equipped, fully staffed Family Hubs. These are Beever, Shaw, Springmeadows, Medlock Vale, Stanley Road and Alexandra.
 - The creation of a seventh Family Hub in the heart of the Town Centre at Oldham Library.
 - Delivery of services from a range of additional buildings and venues within communities as part of an improved outreach offer.
 - The further development of an enhanced online digital, virtual help offer.
 - The de-designation of 10 children's centres which are currently underused or not used and the relocation of the services currently offered within them into other buildings within that local community.

Recommendation

To move forwards with the phased implementation of a remodeled service around 7 Family Hubs.

All new Family Hubs sites are proposed to open during Spring 2024.

The de-designation of the remaining 10 children's centres and relocation of services would be implemented over two phases to ensure residents are fully aware and engaged as services and sessions shift between local buildings.

Phase 1: Due to the lack of current service delivery at Werneth, Royton, Stockbrook, Holly Grove, St James and Springhead children's centres, the de-designation of these buildings would begin immediately with 31 December 2024

Phase 2: Sessions including midwifery, stay and play and appointment only groups and classes would continue to be delivered from the current Coldhurst, Failsworth, Hollinwood, and Saddleworth N&S children's centres until services had been formally relocated to other sites. This would happen no later than 31 March 2025. The administrative de-designation of these building as children centres, however, would begin immediately.

Improving our Services for Children, Young People and their Families

1 Background

- 1.1 In section 5A of the Childcare Act 2006, as amended by section 198 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, so far as is reasonably practicable, the Council is required to make arrangements for sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need (the need of parents, prospective parents and young children in the Oldham borough).
- 1.2 In December 2023 the Council launched a public consultation on plans to remodel our delivery of services for children and families in Oldham around 7 new Family Hubs. This consultation ran until 31 January 2024.

2 Current Position

- 2.1 Oldham's children's centre programme was completed in March 2010 and delivers services for families and young children at 16 centres. While some centres deliver a limited range of family support which includes health appointments, parenting support and learning and development opportunities for children from birth to 5 years, some centres are unused and currently offer no services. None of the current services are accessible online and the digital offer is in its infancy.
- 2.2 In July 2023, Beaver children's centre opened as a newly refurbished Family Hub. The aim being to build on the children's centre offer by extending good quality family help, including parenting & relationship support accessible not just in the early years but throughout childhood. Evidence is already showing an improved, broader range of support is now being offered through Beaver Family Hub to a wider range of families. The hub has also developed an offer of support for families with children with special educational needs and disabilities. There has been a significant increase in the number of children and families accessing support. Data is also showing that families are crossing ward boundaries to access the services being offered.

3. Proposed Position

- 3.1 As part of the public consultation referenced above, the Council invited residents to express their views on a new proposed model which would build on the existing strengths, expertise and current offer delivered through our children centres and the 0-19 Integrated Right Start service. The model would confirm our commitment to delivery of high quality, flexible and accessible services that connect families with a wide range of partners within a place/neighborhood by utilising community buildings.
- 3.2 This proposed model would include:
 - Transforming 6 currently designated children's centres into new, better equipped, fully staffed Family Hubs. These are Beaver, Shaw, Springmeadows, Medlock Vale, Stanley Road and Alexandra.
 - The creation of a seventh Family Hub in the heart of the Town Centre at Oldham Library.
 - Delivery of services from a range of additional buildings and venues within communities as part of an improved outreach offer.
 - The further development of an enhanced online digital, virtual help offer.

- The de-designation of 10 children’s centres which are currently underused or not used and the relocation of the services currently offered within them into other buildings within that local community.

Each new family hub would be open from 9-5 Monday to Friday and will offer a wider range of services and sessions alongside the ability for families to drop in for advice and support on all matters affecting their family from our trained family hub teams.

All existing sessions and services delivered across the borough, including midwifery clinics, stay and play sessions and specific advice and support sessions for issues like breastfeeding and weaning will continue to be delivered from the same neighbourhoods using community centres, libraries, health centres and other community facilities.

4 Consultation Process

4.1 Response Rate

The consultation was extensive with significant communication efforts across all channels (including in person; through children’s centres; through online webinars; across social media and through newsletters) to increase visibility and participation. Consequently, 650 residents completed the survey.

4.2 Demographic Analysis.

- The average age of respondents was 38.6 years.
- The survey revealed that most respondents identified as female. However, approximately 10% of participants identified as male.
- More responses were received from the Saddleworth and Failsworth areas.
- Although lower in numbers, the survey did receive a reasonable response rate from the central areas of Oldham.
- Out of the total number of respondents who provided ethnicity information (542), 82.6% identified as White British, while those of South Asian or Indian backgrounds made up 17.6%.

Ethnicity (where data provided)	Count	Percentage
White British	448	82.60%
Bangladeshi	51	9.50%
Pakistani	35	6.50%
Indian	4	0.80%
Any other Asian background	4	0.80%
Grand Total	542	

- Approximately 10% of survey respondents opted not to answer the question around disability. Out of those who did complete the question, only 8% of respondents identified as having a disability.

4.3 Utilisation of Family Hubs. Beaver Family Hub stands out as a significant data point with the highest number of positive responses. This pattern strongly suggests that communities with established services, such as Beaver Family Hub, exhibit a higher level of support for the proposed transformation. The inference drawn is that residents who have actively engaged with existing Family Hubs, benefitting from their services, tend to value and appreciate the support in place. This connection implies a positive relationship between the presence of operational Family Hubs and community endorsement of the broader changes proposed.

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- 4.4 Utilisation of Current Digital Offer. Of the 135 respondents who indicated that they used the Family Hubs website, a substantial majority of 68% expressed that they found the platform helpful. Beever Family Hub stands out as the only hub or Children’s Centre where respondents are more likely than not to use the Family Hubs website. This distinction is particularly important as Beever Family Hub is currently the sole operational hub in the borough – suggesting a correlation between the presence of an operational hub and the inclination of residents to utilise the website. This may demonstrate that the new Family Hubs model with its blended offer of digital and physical support is becoming embedded into practice with staff embracing a service approach that emphasises accessibility through multiple channels.
- 4.5 Transport and Accessibility. The strongest theme that emerged through analysis of the qualitative comments was the belief that the proposed changes would create additional barriers in accessibility. This was particularly the case in Saddleworth, which has less frequent public transport. Many respondents acknowledged the relative affluence of Saddleworth, and higher levels of car ownership. Nevertheless, respondents from this area felt transport posed a potential barrier to accessing services under the future model.
- 4.6 Perception of Family Hubs. There was widespread praise for Children's Centres and their diverse services. Health visiting teams and baby weigh-ins were recognised as highly accessible. Variations in the kind of offer parents wanted to see were evident across the borough emphasising the need for tailored approaches. Beyond services, the centres play a vital role in building relationships and community ties, particularly in a child's first two years. Described as “friendly,” “welcoming,” and “helpful,” the centres significantly impact mental wellbeing. Staff were praised for their knowledge and camaraderie, highlighting the crucial role of interpersonal relationships in delivering high quality services.
- 4.7 Summary and recommendations. The responses from the consultation support the emerging evidence that we already have: the integration of family services into Family Hubs has broad support, and where this has already happened (Beever Family Hub) we have seen increased take-up of services and increased usage of the enhanced digital offer.

However, residents have expressed concerns about the accessibility of these services. This is particularly the case in specific parts of the borough.

To mitigate residents' concerns about service accessibility, the council will prioritise a transport-sensitive approach in designing and delivering other sites for the future delivery of services. This involves strategically locating services to minimise transportation barriers and considering community input to identify optimal service points.

5. Options/Alternatives

5.1 Option 1.

Proceed with the implementation of the proposed remodeling of family services, including:

- Transforming 6 currently designated children’s centres into new, better equipped, fully staffed Family Hubs. These are Beever, Shaw, Springmeadows, Medlock Vale, Stanley Road and Alexandra.
- The creation of a seventh Family Hub in the heart of the Town Centre at Oldham Library.
- Delivery of services from a range of additional buildings and venues within communities as part of an improved outreach offer.
- The further development of an enhanced online digital, virtual help offer.

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- The de-designation of 10 children's centres which are currently underused or not used and the relocation of the services currently offered within them into other buildings within that local community. In order to address resident concern regarding the accessibility of services during the proposed transformation, the relocation of services will be implemented over two phases:

Phase 1: Due to the lack of current service delivery at Werneth, Royton, Stockbrook, Holly Grove, St James and Springhead children's centres, the de-designation of these buildings would begin immediately.

Phase 2: All sessions including midwifery, stay and play and appointment only groups and classes would continue to be delivered from the current Coldhurst, Failsworth, Hollinwood, and Saddleworth N&S children's centres until services had been formally relocated to other sites. This would happen no later than 31 March 2025. The administrative de-designation of these building as children centres, however, would begin immediately.

5.2 Option 2.

The alternative approach would be for the council to continue to deliver services from the 16 children centre sites. This approach, which focuses on a traditional model of a single building within a place does not align to Oldham's core principles of flexible, place-based integration through improved partnership working.

Maintaining service delivery across 16 buildings will result in a patchy offer to families with limited opportunity for outreach activities. This means that some children and parents may miss out on vital support.

6. **Recommendation**

- 6.1 Option 1: proceed with the phased implementation of a remodeled service based around 7 Family Hubs and the de-designation of 10 children's centres.

7.0 **Timescales for Implementation**

- 7.1 The seven new Family Hubs will be operational by Spring 2024, the administrative de-designation of the remaining children's centres would begin immediately but current services delivered from the sites would continue to be delivered from them while arrangements are made to transfer them to other buildings nearby. This process would be complete no later than March 2025.

8 **Financial Implications**

- 8.1 Financial comments are included in the Part B report. Andy Cooper (Senior Finance Manager)

9 **Legal Implications**

- 9.1 The consultation period began on the 6 December 2023 until the 31 January 2024. This would suitably satisfy the legal requirement for the Council to consult with the local community. In its decision the Council is not seeking to reduce the services offered. The Council have therefore suitably considered the service needs of the local community. (Alex Bougatef, Interim Assistant Director of Legal Services)

10.0 **Co-operative Implications**

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- 10.1 The proposals outline how services will be maintained through the provision of seven new Family Hubs and by ensuring that services are maintained through a network of other community buildings, schools and partner organisations the proposals align with the Council's co-operative aims to support thriving communities and the development of co-operative services. (Amanda Richardson, Policy Manager)

11.0 Human Resource Implications

- 11.1 The implications for staffing of this report are around ways of working; staff should be fully consulted and supported with the transition from being based in a particular location to delivering services in a more agile way. Involving staff in the resolution to any potential barriers can build engagement.
- 11.2 Contracts of employment should be double checked to ensure they support working from any location within the borough, particularly where there are less familiar contracts of staff who previously TUPE transferred from the NHS.
- 11.3 For the associated service redesign, the guidance on redesigning services will be followed and HR will work with the service sought throughout. (Kathryn Pickford, HR Manager)

12 Risk Assessments

- 12.1 Risk comments are included in Part B of the report. (Victoria Gallacher, Head of Insurance and Information Governance)

13 IT Implications

- 13.1 Unknown at this stage, as there needs to be more information provided on the 'Digital Offer'. However, with the acknowledgment that the current digital offer is in its infancy, and that the proposal suggests a comprehensive online digital offer, it implies the need for significant enhancements to the digital infrastructure/services, potentially including the development of a user-friendly online platform to deliver services, engage with families, and provide information.
- 13.2 Careful consideration should be given to the design, usability, and accessibility of the online platform to ensure it caters to the diverse needs of families.
- 13.3 With a move to digital offerings, it becomes crucial to prioritise data security and privacy. Adequate and GDPR compliant measures need to be implemented to safeguard sensitive information, especially when dealing with health-related data for appointments and consultations.
- 13.4 Introducing a new/revised online digital offer may necessitate training for staff and residents. IT training programs should be considered to ensure that all stakeholders can effectively utilise the new digital services. For staff this could be peer led training, for residents this could be video guides or one-page information flyers. (Mark Edgar, IT Manager)

14 Property Implications

- 14.1 De-designation of the 10 Children's Centres will see these buildings or part buildings become vacant and return to Corporate Landlord for management. In order to deliver the property savings set out herein, these assets will need to be disposed of in order to negate the liabilities of the buildings. The potential options for each asset vary depending on the nature of the building, the council's ownership, the type and condition of the asset, its location and external factors such as the building location and potential alternative uses. The process for disposing of council's assets will follow the governance set out in the Land and Property

Protocols which utilizes Corporate Property Board for discussion and decision making around Council assets.

14.2 The remaining seven assets are undergoing investment into the buildings to improve their use and appearance. These works have been tendered and a phased program is due to be delivered in January 2024 through to March 2024.

14.3 The revised model includes the use of other Council assets in a flexible way. The council is keen to see its corporate assets used more intensely by a variety of services not only to uphold the strategy of PBI but to reduce the overall running cost of the corporate estate. (Katy Webster, AD Property & Projects)

15 Procurement Implications

15.1 The Council has a best value duty under section 3 Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised. It is paramount that if the service Authority are Procuring, they must comply with PCR2015 and the Council's contract Procedure rules. The cost analysis of the assets and associated costs must be undertaken, and these costs will need to be specified. The Commercial Procurement unit will support and work with the services. (Mohammad Sharif, Procurement Manager)

16 Environmental and Health & Safety Implications

16.1 The service must have their own risk assessments relating to the activity and training of staff in place, for the delivery of the service. (Samantha Cox, H&S Manager)

17 Community cohesion, including crime and disorder implications in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

17.1 None

18 Oldham Impact Assessment Completed (Including impact on Children and Young People)

18.1 Yes.

19 Key Decision

19.1 Yes

20 Key Decision Reference

20.1 This item has been included on the Forward Plan under reference CHS-06-23

21 Background Papers

21.1 The following is a list of background papers on which this report is based in accordance with the requirements of Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972. It does not include documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information as defined by the Act :File Ref : CHS-05-23

Name of File : Delivering Better Service for Families Through Family Hubs . Records held in [Decision - Delivering Better Services for Families Through Family Hubs \(oldham.gov.uk\)](#)

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22 Appendices N/A