

PART B Report to CABINET

Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children & Young people

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Reason for Decision

The purpose of the report is to seek approval to receive associated funding from the Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health & Social Care (DH&SC) to deliver Year 4 of the Family Hub and Start for Life Programme.

Approval is also sought to delegate authority to agree all spending decisions related to the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme to the Directors of Education, Skills and Early Years and Public Health after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People and noting the role of the Family Hub Board.

Executive Summary

On 20 December 2024, Oldham received notification of its provisional funding allocation of £1,381.400 for fiscal year 2025-26 to continue delivery of the Family Hub and Start for Life Programme.

Payment of the 2025-26 funding allocations is subject to:

- Meeting the current programme expectations up to March 2025; and
- Signing a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalise the Council's agreement to the programme's expectations for the 2025-261 fiscal year.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- the content of the report is noted, and that approval is given to accept the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme funding from Government;
- authority to make all spending decisions relating to Family Hubs and the Start for Life Programme (including key decisions) is delegated to the Directors of Education, Skills and Early Years and Public Health, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People;
- authority is delegated to the Directors of Education, Skills and Early Years and Public Health to award contracts stemming from a compliant procurement process and authority be delegated to the Director of Legal Services to carry out all necessary legal formalities.

Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme – 2025/26

1 Background

- 1.1 In April 2022, the DfE announced that Oldham was one of 75 upper tier local authorities eligible for government funding to deliver Start for Life and Family Hub services over three financial years.
- 1.2 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. They integrate services across health, social care, voluntary and community organisations and education settings.
- 1.3 The Family Hub model is founded on the principle of services being more accessible, better connected, and more relationship centered.
- 1.4 Services are expected to be available to families in the following ways:
 - Face to face at a Family Hub
 - Through a Family Hub, but received elsewhere in the network (e.g. outreach, at a youth centre, a clinical setting such as a health centre, a voluntary and community sector organization or a faith setting).
 - Virtually through the Family Hub, including static online information and/or interactive virtual services.
- 1.5 Oldham Council has already received £3.648m for the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme over three fiscal years of 2022-23; 2023-24; and 2024-25.
- 1.6 Oldham Council has utilised this funding in multiple ways to reshape our services to meet the changing needs of Oldham. This included investing in the refurbishment of 6 existing Children's Centres to transition these to Family Hubs in addition to deliver services and activities from better equipped and positioned council and community facilities.

2 Current Position

- 2.1 Oldham Council now has 7 newly rebranded Family Hubs across the borough which are delivering a range of services funded through the programme. Family Hubs are helping to strengthen the integration between early help and early years services, helping to improve connectivity with our intensive targeted family support services as well as helping to drive and shape meaningful place-based integration and collaboration with partners, including the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector.
- 2.2 The DfE has stipulated how the 2025/26 funding is to be divided across the programme strands.

Table 1: Distribution of funding across the programme with indicative allocations £1.381.400		
Strand	%	£
Family Hubs programme spend	14.1%	194,777.00
Family Hubs capital Spend	6.2%	85,646.00
Parenting support	18%	248,652.00

Home learning environment	9.3%	128,470.00
Parent-infant relationship & perinatal mental health	33.4%	461,387.00
Infant feeding support	17.1%	236,219.00
Publishing Start for Life offers and parent/carer panels	1.9%	26,246.00
		£1.381.400

3 Options/Alternatives

3.1 Option 1: Approve the recommendations set out in the report

- Approve the receipt of Family Hubs and Start for Life funding for the 2025/26 financial year. This will enable the continued delivery of the programme which provides more integrated and accessible services to parents and carers. This is crucial to the delivery of Oldham's early intervention and prevention offer, ultimately contributing to a reduction in inequalities in health and education outcomes for babies, children and families.
- Approve that authority to make all spending decisions relating to Family Hubs and the Start for Life Programme (including key decisions) be delegated to the Director of Education, Skills and Early Years and the Director of Public Health, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People
- Approve that authority be delegated to the Director of Education, Skills and Early Years and the Director of Public Health to award contracts stemming from a compliant procurement process and authority be delegated to the Director of Legal Services carry out all necessary legal formalities.

The services are fully funded through the DfE grant.

This option poses no financial risk to Oldham Council.

3.2 Option 2: Do nothing. This will result in the loss of the Family Hub & Start for Life Programme funding.

This poses a significant reputational risk to Oldham Council as it will no longer be able to deliver its Family Hub and Start for Life programme to families.

Without funding, these crucial and highly valued early family support services to families will end on the 31 March 2025.

This could lead to escalation of need in families and referrals to specialist and more costly services.

4 Preferred Option

4.1 Option 1 is the preferred option for the reasons set out above:

5 Consultation

5.1 The original delivery plan, which sets out programme priorities was developed through consultation with a wider range of partners from across the Council, Health and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector over a series of individual and focus group discussions and a Stakeholder event held on the 17 October 2022.

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- 5.2 During 2022-2025 the voices of children and families have been collected through our Parent Carer Panels. This will contribute to decisions made for the Year 4 delivery plan.

6 **Financial Implications**

- 6.1 Oldham has been informed of a provisional maximum allocation of the Family Hub and Start for Life Programme for financial year 2025-26 in the sum of **£1,381,400**.
- 6.2 Payment of the financial year 2025-26 funding allocations is subject to:
- Meeting the current programme expectations up to March 2025; and
 - Signing a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalise the agreement to the programme's expectations for the 2025-26 financial year.
- 6.3 Whilst Section 31 grants are not statutorily required to be ringfenced, there is a clear expectation as to the purpose of the funding from the sponsoring Government Department. It is therefore proposed that the Council extends the existing ringfencing of the Family Hubs and Start for Life grants to the Education, Skills and Early Years Directorate to the 2025/26 allocation. (Andy Cooper, Senior Finance Manager)

7 **Legal Services Comments**

- 7.1 The Council must comply with all requirements of the DfE funding when expending the monies.
- 7.2 The Council must also comply with the Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs) if works, supplies or services are purchased using the funding, and it is essential that advice is taken from the Commercial Procurement Unit where required by the CPRs.
- 7.3 If the Council intends to make any external grant awards using the funding it will be required to consider and apply the subsidy control regime.
- 7.4 Provided all rules and legislation applicable to the spend are complied with, there should be no legal implications in relation to the recommendations.

(Sarah Orrell – Commercial & Procurement Solicitor)

8. **Co-operative Agenda**

- 8.1 The Family Hubs will make a positive difference to parents, carers, and their children by providing access to a range of integrated support services for the challenges they may be facing. This will develop skills and knowledge, enabling families to help children get the best start in life. As such the proposal aligns with the aims of the Council's Co-operative agenda.

9 **Human Resources Comments**

- 9.1 Accepting the Family Hub grant will enable the service to continue delivery of Oldham's Family Hub & Start for Life Programme.

If delivery of the programme results in the employment of a new employee to Oldham establishment or extension of fixed term contracts the service is advised to be mindful of the implications related to fixed term contracts.

Entitlement to redundancy payment will be relevant when an individual has over 2 years continuous service and **if** an individual has previous continuous service with other local authorities this may be relevant in calculation of a redundancy payment.

In addition, when the employment contract is issued it is essential to be clear about the reasons for the post being fixed term and where possible be specific about what area/tasks the role will be responsible for. (Rebecca Jones 14.02.2024)

10 Risk Assessments

10.1 None

11 IT Implications

11.1 None

12 Property Implications

12.1 None

13 Procurement Implications

13.1 No procurement has been detailed above for CPU to comment on, and each requirement would need to come to CPU for comments. Funds would need to be used compliantly with relevant legislation (potentially PCR2015, PA23 and PSR) along with compliance with the Council CPRs. Any funding may also need to consider things like State Aid, Aggregation, amongst others. The Directors of Education, Skills and Early Years and Public Health after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People and noting the role of the Family Hub Board, must still seek advice from both CPU and Legal to ensure the Council spends the money in a legally compliant way and doesn't make decisions which could lead to challenges particularly post 24th Feb 2025 when the Procurement Act 23 goes live and has been created with increased transparency of the spending of public money. As such, it is recommended that a process be agreed as soon as possible, to ensure any potential spend plans are shared with CPU in advance of any engagement with potential suppliers and in order to ensure legally compliant use of the funds outlined in this report.
James England – Procurement Manager

14 Environmental and Health & Safety Implications

14.1 None

15 Equality, community cohesion and crime implications

15.1 None

16 Implications for Children and Young People

16.1 The Family Hub & Start for Life Programme will directly benefit children and young people with a specific focus on those with greatest disadvantage.

17 Equality Impact Assessment Completed?

17.1 No

18	Key Decision
18.1	Yes
19	Key Decision Reference
19.1	CHS-01-25
20	Background Papers
20.1	NONE
21	Appendices
21.1	NONE