Family Hubs Network Limited – Written evidence (PSC0052)

Description of Family Hubs in response to question: How should central Government coordinate public services to support vulnerable children to recover from effects of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Submission from the Family Hubs Network ([Home - The Family Hubs Network](#))

1. WHAT Family Hubs do and HOW they do it:

Family Hubs, and the systems they are part of are characterised by these nine principles (expanded with links to relevant webpages in Appendix below):

- Superb **early years (0-5)** provision so families get whatever help they need to give their children the best start in life and ensure they are school-ready.
- An understanding of the importance of **Early Help and prevention**.
- Families with children aged **0-19 (and up to 25 for SEND**) have somewhere they know they can go if they need information, advice or guidance for family, relationship and other issues.
- **Integrated** health and public health priorities, such as health visiting and maternity, with social services and Troubled Families programmes.
- Central **access** point to services/support, connected to all other local delivery sites.
- A **relational culture** embodied by everyone who works in the Hub.
- A **whole-family approach** which focuses on disadvantaged and vulnerable children.
- Parents can access **relationship support** when there is conflict, including after separation
- The **voluntary sector and wider community** make an extensive and vital contribution.

2. [What is distinctive about Family Hubs](#)?

Family Hubs provide a central access point for integrated services, whether this is a building named a Family Hub, a building with another title, or a virtual access point. It's important that families know where to go and get help, and that staff and volunteers are trained to respond sensitively and effectively to families' enquiries. The Family Hub model enables every region to make the most of the buildings/delivery sites they have available. Most commonly, a Family Hub is co-located with other services and signposts families to services within the same building but is equally integrated with services provided at other delivery sites (described by some as 'spokes' of the hub).

3. The relationships between the Family Hub, families and other delivery sites are equally important to ensure a whole family approach and, as far as possible, a seamless, integrated service. An indication that a Family Hub is working well is when a family need tell their story only once and services and people then work together to give that family the support they need. Ideally digital integration also enables families to access help and advice online.

4. **WHY they are needed**:

Parents who are struggling with difficulties in their relationships (with their children and other adults, particularly each other), finances and other areas of family life will often not know where to find help, who they can turn to and how to stop problems from escalating. Family Hubs are flexible, attuned to local needs and able to connect families with the right help from the right people in the right way. They are a key element of integrated working which enables families with children aged 0-19 to access early help to overcome difficulties and build stronger relationships. Timely prevention reduces the need for crisis intervention by social care services. Across the country they are faced with high and rising numbers of children who are 'in need', on child protection plans, and coming into care.

5. In addition, children from poorly functioning families often underachieve in school, have poor physical and mental health and are more likely to become caught up in drugs, gangs and other criminal activity. This makes it harder for them to gain satisfying employment, form healthy relationships and nurture their own children. Without the readily accessible family support Hubs can provide, along a spectrum of need and throughout the time children and young people are dependent on their parents (0-19), many will experience these and other poor outcomes linked to the breakdown of family relationships.

6. Couples in chronic conflict who do not receive timely and effective help will struggle to resolve difficulties and provide their children with the safe, stable and nurturing relationships they need to thrive. Even after separating, some couples may find it impossible to leave that conflict behind and co-parent well, in their children's best interests, without the right support. Families coping with disabilities are often unaware of the help that is available to them locally or how to access it.

7. A range of 'whole-family' support provided seamlessly through these centres avoids the 'silo working' that can mean families are bounced from one service to another and have to repeat their story again and again. This support is frequently co-located with well-designed universal and targeted early years services which ensure children have the best start in life. Coming into these Hubs raises new parents' awareness of other support they might need to ensure their children grow, flourish and fulfil their potential.

APPENDIX – Expanded Principles and Case Study Material

Principle of 'families with children 0-19' (and up to 25 for SEND)

The Family Hub model maintains a focus on the early years but extends family support to families with children aged 0-19 in recognition that families can face challenges at any time. Building on the heritage and experience of Sure Start children's centres, Family Hubs further develops early years services as they provide a key fulcrum point to improve outcomes.

During the early years, families build trusted and valued relationships with the people they meet in family support. Rather than sever this relationship when a child reaches five, parents can continue to contact a familiar team and access

trusted information, advice and guidance. This helps them find the right help online, over the phone or in person, either at the Family Hub or at another delivery site, where services for families with older children are available.

It makes sense for families to have a main point of access (place, phone and/or website) through these years to which they can repeatedly return and from where they can source a range of help for all the issues that can impact upon families, including their young children.

Principle of 'early help and prevention'

As prevention is a priority in the Family Hub model, a local authority's Early Help strategy is an essential element of local design. Family Hubs are the 'Early Help Front Door' where families can get help in the right way at the right time. Early Help and early years often go hand in hand as the pace of change, and emergence of issues is particularly swift in the early years and Early Help, to prevent issues becoming entrenched challenges, is essential.

Principle of 'integrated'

To achieve better outcomes for families, 'practice-based evidence shows that integration makes a significant difference'. Within the Family Hub model, integration is applied in several ways:

- **Multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams** working together closely and in a coordinated way so families get the support they need in a way which puts helping them solve their problems at the heart of the process. It's not about a series of referrals or interventions but about practitioners working together to make the difference that's needed. When a Family Hub is working well a family need only tell their story once and services and people then work together to give that family the support they need. Achieving cross organisation buy-in to create integrated working is essential and local authorities can learn from others' experiences.

  - o Bringing **health and CCGs** into the Family Hub is especially important for early years, to reach and support expectant parents, for example, in Stockton-in-Tees, below. All perinatal services including ante-natal appointments; ante- and post-natal education classes; health visiting; post-natal support; and maternal and infant mental health can be co-located or coordinated from within Family Hubs. Different ways local authorities work with health are explored here. Family Hubs' Advisory Boards can facilitate multi-agency working and collaboration can be achieved in a number of ways.

CASE STUDY: Stockton-on-Tees
A Community and Partnership Manager at Stockton-on-Tees describes how: "The Family Hub model promotes a more integrated way of working with services and developing a wider offer to families with children aged 0-19. The concept is around strengthening the approach to preventative work with families, prior to the point of escalation to statutory services, with the

---

integration of Health Visitors and School Nurses on site. We also accommodate midwifery services on each site and an independent nursery provider within each setting. We have four Family Hubs across the Borough which provide a range of services. The Family Hubs act as a one-stop-shop to allow families to access a range of services under one roof. Staff are upskilled and have a broad knowledge of other services outside of our provision, to enable them to signpost families more effectively.

Weekly meetings are held within Early Help to identify the most appropriate support available to families and to allow for a more joined up approach across services."

Stockton offer the following services:

Sleep Workshops Healthy Baby Weigh-In A number of parent/volunteer led groups Midwifery appointments First Aid Courses/Home Safety equipment. Sleep Clinic – 0-18 years Health clinic - baby weigh Cafes Evidenced-based parenting courses (0-19) Baby yoga Baby massage Smoking cessation Change, Grow, Live (CGL) Drug and Alcohol Service – Drop in sessions	Drug and alcohol awareness sessions Harbour (domestic abuse) – Drop in sessions Benefits advice Job Club – 16-29 years CAMHS – Workshops Joint groups with Youth Direction General relaxation for parents SEND Drop-in advice service Cooking on a budget; Maths and English Courses; Amazing You (learning and skills) and Mental Health Awareness Courses E-Solihull Relax Kids

- The ability to **register births** in Family Hubs provides an opportunity to alert expectant parents to the support services available and reduce any stigma associated with going through the doors. It also ensures Hubs get the birth data they need to plan services.

- By working in this way, and delivering a system for everyone from those with universal through to intensive need, families can experience **seamless transitions** from one level of help to another. If a family's crisis escalates, practitioners working together within a well-designed system receive more intensive support without delay or starting from scratch with a new referral. Similarly, when a family makes progress, they can move to a lower level of support, without facing a cliff-edge moment when intensive support comes to an end. All this helps to reduce stigma.

- Being 'integrated' also means **sharing data**. This can be a stumbling block but we have seen how agencies can overcome this so they can work together better, by ensuring that new IT systems are compatible with other agencies' software (as has been achieved for example, in Brent). And by asking families for consent to share information, in the right way at the right time (for example in Yeovil/South Somerset, where hub

deliverers have sensitively adapted their processes and as a result have high levels of consent and engagement among their families).

- And the fourth area of integration, which may sound quite ambitious but is highly valued by those who practice it, is having **shared outcomes** (see Essex study below). This means that all agencies involved in supporting families agree the shared outcomes they are working towards and then work out, who is going to do what, to make sure those outcomes are achieved. This can involve, for individual families, creating a Family Plan (e.g. City of Westminster) and/or more broadly working together to achieve county-wide targets (such as Essex, where this also involves an innovative approach to budgets).

CASE STUDY: Doncaster
Doncaster's system collects extensive data to demonstrate the outcomes of their work.
Slides: https://familyhubsnetwork.org.uk/event/family-hubs-webinar/
Video of presentation:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5Caj4CMKMQ&list=PLSBqP_HC1oQgEvcUo0p-nTIhK47lLeaXp&index=6

CASE STUDY: Essex
In Essex, the local system design of the Family Hub model illustrates how integrated can work effectively and achieve good outcomes.
Slides: https://familyhubsnetwork.org.uk/event/family-hubs-webinar/
Video of presentation:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wY46CeqVKWk&list=PLSBqP_HC1oQgEvcUo0p-nTIhK47lLeaXp&index=2&t=1s

---

Principle of 'whole family approach'

Rather than focusing on the child or member of the family needing support, in isolation, those practising the Family Hub model consider the child within the context of their core relationships and the people around them, and tackle the problems with interventions that will work within this context. Quite often, **the presenting problem is not the core challenge**: extremely difficult toddler behaviour can be the presenting problem but unemployment, housing issues or substance abuse can emerge as significant factors and this is where the 'whole family approach' identifies this and, because of the connectedness within the system, is able to tackle it (e.g. Isle of Wight case study below).

Coupled with this is the way in which Family Hubs prioritise **supporting relationships** within the family. We can be in the habit of addressing the problem of the child or parent. Quite often, it's weaknesses in the relationships between the family which are causing distress as well as hindering progress. Family Hubs provide counselling and programmes to address child-parent violence, couple relationship as well as parenting skills as part of family support. The DWP's interest in reducing parental conflict and, with MoJ, in post-separation support features in this part of Hubs' work.

The early years have a particular influence on the whole family. The arrival of a baby sends ripples - or a tsunami - throughout the family unit/context. Therefore, the 'whole family approach' is crucial to understanding a family's needs and tackling related issues as well as the presenting ones e.g. a toddler's sleeping problems can put enormous strain on couple relationships and in this situation, providing relationship support may be just as important as establishing better sleeping patterns.

So, how does the Family Hub model provide family support, for families with children 0-19, which prioritises prevention, the whole family in an integrated way? It's about creating a system where **access** is key families know where to go and get help. Access must be straightforward and this is especially important in the early years when families need convenient and speedy help, with the demands that an infant makes.

Principle of 'access'

Family Hubs have a central point from where services are accessed, whether this is a building named a Family Hub, a building with another title, or a virtual access point, by phone, email or online form. This access point is often called the Early Help Front Door, Integrated Front Door, or One Stop Shop.

Local Family Hub system designs (see box below) make the most of the **buildings/delivery sites** they have available and respond to local need, for example, ensuring the access points in buildings are in areas of greatest need (e.g. deprived housing estate) or with greatest reach (e.g. library, civic building). But the system can only work well if the access points are well connected with services and practitioners based in other buildings.

Local system design
The connectedness of the Family Hub model and its outworking in the relationship between buildings and teams in a local area is most easily grasped as a '**hub and spokes' model**, where one building is nominated as the main hub and other buildings are delivery sites connected to it. When this is well communicated to families and is central to the thinking of staff, family support is easily and effectively accessed through the hub and delivered through the delivery sites (as well as the hub in most local designs).

When a physical hub building is not used as a hub, the hub and spokes model is not redundant but works differently. In this '**virtual hub'** design, connectedness is just as important and communication to families about how the virtual hub operates is more important as there is no physical manifestation of that intention.

In local system designs, the hub and spokes model tends to evolve into a system of connectedness which can seem, to the outsider's eye, more complex but is in fact evidence of a local authority adapting their existing estate and connecting with other delivery sites (operated by the voluntary sector for example) to capitalise on existing infrastructure and meet local need.

Having 'hub' buildings which are physical centres of the family support offer help make the whole offer more tangible for families. Sometimes the hub is

positioned within a building known for another service (see below) sometimes the building is called the Family Hub (or similar name), and other services are co-located there.

Often children's centres are used for this purpose (following [consultation](#)). This works well for families, who have accessed Children's Centres in children's early years, and it makes sense to continue to receive help in a place which is trusted and familiar. Some children's centres have become Family Hubs, some children's centres host a 'Family Hub'.

CASE STUDY: Isle of Wight
On the Isle of Wight, the local system design lifted children's services out of special measures and transformed family support delivery. On this journey, children's centres were repurposed as part of a comprehensive strategy to reach and support families more effectively.
Slides: https://familyhubsnetwork.org.uk/event/family-hubs-webinar/
Video of presentation:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_uOPo9hPaE&list=PLSBqP_HC1oQgEvcUo0p-nTIhK47lLeaXp&index=5
Video of integrated working on Isle of Wight:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ke6QFBZL9NI

Other facilities which host a Family Hub include: local libraries, GP surgeries, health clinics, [schools](#), registry offices, community centres, church and faith venues and Citizens Advice Bureaux. The diversity of how buildings are used within the Family Hub model illustrates the extent to which local Family Hub systems reflect the local situation, a core strength of the model which introduces complexity when trying to compare one local system with another.

Alongside access via a building, there is **virtual access**. This is equally important to those delivering the Family Hub model. Families need to be able to look online or pick up the phone. Family Hubs need to ensure that this information is well publicised and that such access points are well serviced, delivering a timely and helpful response, in a relational way.

The centre where families access help is well connected to the full extent of the local offer of family support. Without this **connectedness** (with practitioners, services – both local authority and voluntary sector – buildings and the **digital online offer**) it cannot deliver the help families need. Digital connectedness has become more important than ever during the 2020 Covid crisis in not only publicising but also delivering universal services.

Principle of 'relational culture'

Many families' enthusiasm for children's centres was derived from the relational approach they had experienced. The Family Hub model takes this a step further and prioritises a relational culture to infuse all areas of family support.

Relational culture is about understanding the value and impact of how we relate to each other. This applies to the system as a whole and specifically, staff to families and staff to staff.

An example of the how this is implemented within the Family Hub model is in the London Borough of Westminster, where a relational culture is achieved in part through delivering a workforce training programme to both local authority staff and their partners in voluntary sector organisations.

Principle of 'relationship support'

Families, particularly with young children, are often under strain and relationships need to develop resilience if they are to be sustained during the child-raising years. Despite support, some may not last and sepating/separated families often need specialist help with transition. The Family Hub model actively champions the value and importance of all kinds of couple support and challenges the taboo of talking about relationship health. DWP's Reducing Parental Conflict programmes are starting to be delivered in Family Hubs.

Principle of 'working with the voluntary sector'

The voluntary sector's role in Family Hubs is extensive and valuable. From providing universal services through to being partners in delivering statutory services, national and local community-based voluntary sector organisations enable local authorities to reach more families and provide a greater offer. By connecting families to the wider voluntary sector offer, local authorities not only reduce pressure on their own services (enabling the local authority to focus on those with greater need) but also provide families with the opportunity to build their relationships and network in the community which has longer-term and far-reaching benefits. This is particularly valuable for new parents as this is an important time to build their own network of support in the community.