

	Brent Health and Wellbeing Board 28 October 2024
	Report from the Corporate Director, Children and Young People
	Lead Cabinet Member: Dr Gwen Grahl
Family Wellbeing Centre and Start for Life progress update	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Family Wellbeing Centre Annual Report (2023/24) Appendix 2 - Update on the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on the progress of the Family Wellbeing Centres (FWCs) and Family Hub and Start for Life programmes. The FWCs were launched in January 2021 and the delivery model continues to develop with new partnerships being created, and service delivery increasing across all centres. The FWC annual report 2023-24 is attached as Appendix 1.

1.2 The Family Hubs and Start for Life programme is funded by the DfE and the delivery plan commenced in the spring of 2023. The programme identified 6 key strands of work for which 75 eligible LAs, including Brent, were allocated funding. The programme guide set out 'minimum' requirements that had to be met by the end of the programme (March 2025), as well 'go further' requirements and these are detailed below. The Family Hubs and Start for Life programme is delivered as an integral part of the wider FWC service

offer. A detailed Family Hubs and Start for Life progress report is attached as Appendix 2.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board are asked to note the progress of the FWC and Start for Life programmes.

2.2 The Health and Wellbeing Board are asked to make recommendations, particularly regarding potential new partnerships and funding/resourcing opportunities, to strengthen the FWC delivery model and support with sustaining the Start for Life offer post funding ending in March 2025.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

3.1.1 The FWC and Start for Life programmes offer a wide range of support to families and link to the Borough Plan priorities:

- Prosperity and Stability in Brent
- Thriving Communities
- The Best Start in Life
- A Healthier Brent.

3.1.2 The programmes also support the Digital Inclusion strategy and help to address the impact of cost-of-living challenges and childhood poverty.

3.2 Background

Family Wellbeing Centres

3.2.1 Brent has a well-established Early Help service that FWCs are an integral part of. The FWCs provide a universal 'front door' for families to access a wide range of early help and preventative services, including some targeted support.

3.2.2 There is a core service offer across all the FWCs and some variation depending on local needs and what services are delivered in the community. A description of the FWC service offer is detailed in appendix 1 and includes for example health and wellbeing, education and childcare, parenting and relationship, and activities for children of all ages and stages. There are currently over 130 different family support activities and services available to book online.

3.2.3 FWCs are at the heart of Brent's Early Help community-based offer and are a priority in the Borough Plan (2023-27). The FWCs provide an integrated 'whole family' (for children aged 0-18 years old, and 25 for those with SEND), bringing together a wide range of services and support into a single offer.

This arrangement helps the co-ordination and delivery of services for more vulnerable children using contextual safeguarding approaches.

- 3.2.4 FWCs are open full time with several centres offering early evening youth activities. There is some Saturday opening on rotation across the FWCs to facilitate a support session for families / children with SEND. Each FWC is shaped by a Local Steering Group (LSG) of stakeholders and there is integrated working across Brent's Early Help network to efficiently and effectively respond to the needs of local families using a holistic approach. The LSG link to the FWC Operational Board which has multi-agency representation at a more senior level.
- 3.2.5 The Willow FWC is predominantly a SEND hub providing support services to families of children with SEND using an approach to identify children's needs early and putting in place interventions to prevent an escalation of need. All FWCs have SEND navigators promoting and signposting families to Brent's SEND local offer and other relevant support.
- 3.2.6 The Willow FWC is co-located with a nursery for children aged 0-4yrs. The nursery is registered to provide full-time care for 98 childcare places. The places are managed flexibly to accommodate the needs of the community. The nursery offers 30 places for Children with a Disability (CWD) and 28 places for Children in Need (CiN). Willow FWC also has enhanced childcare provision offering 12 places to children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), on a part-time offer.
- 3.2.7 FWCs work closely with Brent Community Hubs to ensure there are effective working relationships in place to support all of Brent's residents. Managers from the respective services meet periodically to review service delivery, update on current developments, and address any partnership working challenges.
- 3.2.8 The FWCs focus is on prevention and early intervention, using a whole family approach to stop problems escalating and requiring higher tier and more costly support. An early help approach achieves better outcomes for families and reduces the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences, enabling families to thrive.
- 3.2.9 When FWCs were established they were focused on delivery against 6 key priority areas:
1. A reduction in referrals to higher level interventions
 2. Prevention of family breakdown resulting in entry to care
 3. Addressing the growing challenge of serious youth violence
 4. Building capacity in universal services so that they can support children earlier
 5. Successful delivery of the Healthy Child Programme (0-19)
 6. Successfully discharge statutory responsibilities with respect to children's centres.

A detailed update on progress against each priority is included in the FWC Annual report 2023-24, attached as Appendix 1.

Family Hubs and Start for Life

3.2.10 The Family Hubs and Start for Life programme was created in response to gaps reflected in the findings of 'The best start for life, a vision for the 1,001 critical days' review by Andrea Leadsom MP, the 'Independent Review of Children's Social Care' published in May 2022 and 'Ofsted's thematic inspection of early help services'. These reports identified the complex landscape that families, and particularly those most vulnerable and disadvantaged, are negotiating when trying to access services and the absence of a single, non-stigmatising point of access which could aid and ease this navigation process. The Start for Life programme's aims include improving how local services share information and work together to provide holistic support to families, to move away from a focus on crisis intervention to a system that identifies risks early and prevents problems from escalating - delivering better, long-term outcomes.

3.2.11 The Family Hubs and Start for Life programme identified 6 key strands of work:

- Family Hubs transformation funding
- Parenting support
- Parent–infant relationships and perinatal mental health support
- Early language and the Home Learning Environment
- Infant feeding strand
- Parent and carer panels; and publishing the Start for Life offer.

A detailed update on progress against each strand is included in the Family Hubs and Start for Life progress report, attached as Appendix 2.

3.2.12 Following sign-up and commitment through a delivery plan in Spring 2023, the Start for Life programme has been rolled out in Brent. The Infant Feeding support and Perinatal mental health and parent / infant relationships strands are being led by Public Health and the remaining 4 strands are being led by the Early Help Service within CYP. Multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working groups were set up for each strand during the development and implementation phases.

3.2.13 The Family Hubs and Start for Life steering group is the forum where proposals are discussed and progressed between agencies. Representatives are senior managers and service managers within their respective organisations. The Family Hubs and Start for Life steering group links to the FWC Operational Board and this forms the governance arrangements.

Outcomes

3.2.14 The outcomes and impact achieved for families through the FWC and Start for Life programmes is wide ranging given the diverse range of services on offer. The outcomes and impact achieved depend on what services families are accessing, how well they engage, and the length of the intervention. For example, some families could access ad-hoc stay and play sessions of 1 hour duration, where others receive targeted key worker/ lead professional support lasting up to 1 year and as part of this work multiple agencies will be involved. The full range of support on offer that improves family outcomes is detailed in the FWC and Start for Life progress reports attached as appendix 1 and 2. Outcomes and impact are evidenced through for example: contract monitoring data from commissioned services, case studies, case files, direct work tools, service user feedback, outcome/impact reports following the completion of interventions, Outcome Starts, and bi-annual parent satisfaction surveys. During the 2023-24 financial year 18,113 families were supported to achieve positive outcomes in the following areas:

- Improved family finances and reducing the impact of the cost-of-living crisis
- Reduced numbers of families presenting as homeless, securing long term accommodation and reducing the threat of eviction
- Improved family nutrition, weight management and access to fresh fruit and vegetables
- Support to stop smoking improving family health and wellbeing
- Improving school attendance, punctuality and engagement with school, leading to better educational attainment
- Improved oral health and reducing teeth extraction for under 5's
- Improved parent/ carer and CYP mental health and wellbeing
- Improved parenting capacity leading to better relationships between parents and their children, reducing children's behavioural problems and improving communication
- Reducing negative discipline practices such as smacking and providing parents with alternative approaches to discipline
- Improving CYP and parent/ carers emotional literacy
- Reducing substance misuse and the negative impact on families
- Improved family fitness leading to better wellbeing outcomes
- Increasing families engagement with early help, preventative and intervention services, including refugee/ asylum seekers and less heard from groups
- Reducing the risk of domestic abuse and providing a whole family offer to process the trauma of domestic abuse
- Improving parents' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, and soft skills leading to employment opportunities
- Reducing parental conflict and the negative impact on families
- Reducing the negative impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences and trauma
- Increasing families resilience to the impact of multiple disadvantages
- Supporting parents and young people into employment and to access educational and work experience opportunities

- Increased identification rates of young carers linking them into support and reducing the impact of caring responsibilities on CYP
- Reducing social isolation, particularly for new mums
- Improving a range of outcomes for families of children with SEND
- Improving children's school readiness, particularly ensuring children have good Speech Language and Communication
- Preventing family problems becoming more complex and entrenched by intervening earlier and providing the right support at the right time
- Preventing family breakdown and CYP going into care
- Helping families to thrive, be happy, and achieve their goals.

Note, not all families access FWC and Start for Life support services and this continues to impact on children's school readiness, oral health and obesity outcomes. In addition, mobility in some areas of Brent remains high with families new to the UK who may not be aware of the range of support services available. Work continues across the FWC and Start for Life partnership to address these issues.

Learning

3.2.15 The FWC and Start for life programmes has led to many important learning opportunities, including for example:

- Officers have mapped the FWCs and Start for Life offers to identify gaps, improve the coordination and planning of service delivery between multi-agency partners. This whole family multi-agency co-ordinated partnership approach has helped to better meet the needs of families impacted by the cost-of-living and mental health and wellbeing crisis, and to sustain positive outcomes.
- There is ongoing appreciation and learning regarding the role of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) providers to help deliver a sustainable model, particularly when the Start for Life programme funding ends. The FWCs have worked with 20+ different VCS providers of varying sizes. The VCS provide a range of activities for families and children at all ages and stages, including for example: advice and advocacy, domestic abuse, adult learning, family fitness, after-school and holiday provision for CYP, mentoring, counselling, entrepreneurship and environmental activities. The VCS is also involved in governance arrangements at all levels.
- The co-production of activities and the creation of a Youth Panel has enabled CYP to take an active part in improving the FWC youth offer and influencing strategic decisions. Children and young people have been involved in the process of creating strategies that improve their childhood experiences and future life chances. Being visible and heard is a strategic priority within the Borough Plan, SEND strategy and the CYP Participation and Engagement Strategy. Strong engagement with children and young people has led to an increase in the number registering at FWCs and taking up services and support. It was evident from feedback that young people wanted activities to

help them develop skills to improve their education and employment chances. By giving young people the opportunity to participate, encourage, and value their input, they can be supported to improve outcomes in their adult life.

Forward planning

3.2.16 The FWCs and Start for Life programme key priorities for the 2024-25 financial year are to:

1. Deliver the final year of the Start for Life programme delivery plan with a focus on exit planning and sustainability
2. Develop stronger links to the Council's strategic change programme to ensure that FWCs improve and evolve to tackle current and emerging challenges in meeting the needs of Brent's local communities, helping to empower communities and build resilience
3. Increase the number of parents completing accredited parenting workshops, particularly those referred from front line practitioners
4. Develop the FWC youth offer linked to the refreshed Youth Strategy and delivery plan.
5. Support the Early Help and Social Care redesign programme to contribute to the development of a service that is fit for the future.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 The Lead Member for Children, Young People and Schools has discussed the FWC and Start for Life projects with senior officers. Significant consultation has taken place regarding development of the FWCs and subsequent Start for Life programme. Various focus groups were delivered during the design and consultation period with multi-disciplinary staff, stakeholders, partners and parents.

4.2 Well established governance arrangements for both projects are in place with multi-agency representation at strategic and operational levels. Parents are involved with governance at the operational level via the FWC Local Steering Groups.

4.3 A Parent Carer Voice Forum was established as part of the Start for Life programme to ensure there was a strong parent voice in shaping the offer. Parents were recruited with children at different ages and stages, children with SEND, dads and pregnant parents to ensure a diverse group and a wide range of views were captured.

4.4 A Youth Panel has been established to co-produce and develop the CYP offer.

4.5 Feedback mechanisms are in place to capture the views of service users and this is used to improve the FWC and Start for Life delivery models to help ensure services and support offered actively engages families and meets their wide-ranging needs. In general service user satisfaction rates are high

across the FWC, as evidenced by the spring 2023 parent survey which had over 2,000 responses, and demand for services continues to grow.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 To detail any relevant financial and budgetary implications/comments relating to the proposals within the report.

5.2 Following the Cabinet decision to develop the FWCs, savings of £1.5m per annum have been delivered to core funding since the changeover from Children’s Centres in 2020.

5.3 A total of £4,209,172 has been allocated to Brent as part of the Start for Life programme, across 3 years as set out below:

2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	Total
£896,072	£1,809,600	£1,503,500	£4,209,172

5.4 The table below shows expected distribution of the Start for Life funding across the programme strands:

Strand	%	Funding range over the life of the programme
Family Hubs programme spend	18.6	£777,480 – £814,680
Family Hubs capital spend	4.7	£196,460 – £205,860
Perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships	31.6	£1,320,880 – £1,384,080
Parenting support	16.8	£702,240 – £735,840
Infant feeding support	15.5	£647,900 – £678,900
Home learning environment services	9.6	£401,280 – £420,480
Start for life offer and Parent Carer panels	3.1	£129,580 – £135,780

5.5 LAs were expected to spend each annual allocation within the financial year. However, it was acknowledged that given the late confirmation and payment of funding, particularly in Year 1, that this was not possible. The underspend for 2022-23 was carried over to the next financial year and the cumulative underspend across the 2 years has been used in Year 3.

5.6 Statements of Grant usage alongside other regular progress updates on actual, committed and planned spend have been provided to the Start for Life unit. The programme was scheduled to end in March 2025 and this posed a risk of a clawback in grant funding as spend was slower than anticipated due to delays highlighted in the risks section above.

5.7 In acknowledgment that local authorities needed some certainty in order to manage budgets and service delivery of this programme, the Start for Life

unit confirmed on 19 September 2024 that the grant funding may be used to deliver FH/ SfL programme activities beyond 31 March 2025 and that the amount being carried forward to 2025-26 should be detailed within the council's next statement of grant usage (due to be commissioned in September 2024).

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 The statutory obligations in the Childcare Act 2006 ("the 2006 Act") concern "young children", which essentially are those aged between 0-5. Section 1 of the 2006 Act imposes on local authorities a general duty in relation to the well-being of young children to:

- a) improve the well-being of young children in their area, and
- b) reduce inequalities between young children in their area in relation to:
 - Physical and mental health and emotional well-being
 - Protection from harm and neglect.
 - Education, training and recreations.
 - The contribution made by them to society
 - Their social and economic well-being.

6.2 S.3 of the 2006 Act sets out specific duties the council has in relation to early childhood services which includes early years provision and provides that the council must make arrangements to secure that early childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner which is calculated to facilitate access to those services, and maximise the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children. In discharging its duties, the council must have regard to any guidance given from time to time by the Secretary of State.

6.3 Section 5A of the 2006 Act provides that:

(1) Arrangements made by an English Local Authority under section 3(2) must, so far as is reasonably practicable, include arrangements for sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need.

(2) "Local need" is the need of parents, prospective parents and young children in the authority's area."

7.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 The public sector equality duty, as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who have a "protected characteristic" and those who do not share that protected characteristic. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

7.2 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.

7.3 There is no prescribed manner in which the Council must exercise its public sector equality duty but having an adequate evidence base for its decision is necessary.

7.4 An Equality Impact Assessment in relation to FWCs was completed as part of the Cabinet report submitted in October 2019. A further Equality Impact Assessment was completed as part of the Start for Life programme in 2023.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 N/A

9.0 Human Resources/ Property Considerations (if appropriate)

9.1 N/A

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 A communications plan is in place detailing who, how, when and where we publicise information regarding the FWC and Start for Life programmes. This includes for example posters, leaflets, social media, partnership forums, a video, the website, multi-agency meetings, schools, health, VCFS and Police. Most families are connected into FWC support services via a professional they are working with, or via word of mouth from another service user. Improved communications have resulted in an increase in families registering and demand for services.

10.2 A focus this past financial year has been on improving communication with schools and this has included for example: attending school cluster meetings, attending school Designated Safeguarding Lead/ SENDCo forums, publicising the offer in the Headteachers bulletin/ Schools Extranet/ Governors termly newsletter, via Family Solutions Key Workers linked to schools, joint outreach to schools to attend coffee mornings, parent workshops, etc and the CYP Wellbeing Alliance network.

10.3 Public Health used Start for Life funding to recruit x2 Communication and Engagement Officers for a fixed term to develop an enhanced promotional campaign including print, digital and social media to raise awareness of breastfeeding and peri-natal mental health services and promote access to and use of FWC by Brent's most least heard from and disadvantaged communities. This includes for example attending community meetings,

videos (with translated subtitles), digital ads (with translated versions), printed flyers, posters and promotional maternity packs.

- 10.4 Work continues across the FWC partnership to promote registration and take-up of services and success is reflected by increasing registrations, reach and contacts with families, benchmarked against last year's performance data.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director

Children and Young People