	Cabinet 7 September 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development
	Lead Member - Cabinet Member for Children Services, Employment & Climate Action (Councillor Jake Rubin)

Future Commissioning and Delivery Options for Best Start Family Hubs Support Services

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
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:	Two Appendix 1: Financial cost analysis Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Palvinder Kudhail, Director of Early Help and Social Care 020 8937 Palvinder.kudhail@brent.gov.uk Serita Kwofie, Head of Early Help 020 8937 1747 serita.kwofie@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to insource Best Start Family Hubs (BSFHs) support services, currently delivered by Barnardo's Services Limited, when the existing contractual arrangements come to an end in March 2027. The recommendation supports a more integrated, Council-led Family Hub and Early Help model from April 2027.

1.2 National policy continues to position Family Hubs as a central mechanism for improving outcomes for children and families through integrated early intervention and prevention. Locally, BSFH support services directly support

Brent’s priorities to improve outcomes for children, reduce inequalities, strengthen school readiness and parenting capacity and ensure families can access help at the earliest opportunity.

1.3 A review of future delivery options, including benchmarking with other local authorities, has concluded that an in-house model offers the strongest balance of service quality, accountability, integration, ease of delivery and value for money. It would enable the Council to align the BSFH workforce within a single management structure strengthening oversight of outcomes to deliver a sustainable preventative offer for children, young people and families.

2.0 Recommendations

That Cabinet**:**

2.1 Approve the insourcing of the majority of Best Start Family Hubs Support Services from 1 April 2027, creating a fully integrated Council-led Family Hub and Early Help model that strengthens accountability, consistency of practice, quality assurance, service integration and value for money.

2.2 Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children’s Services, Employment and Climate Action, to take all necessary steps to implement the transition, including consultation, workforce arrangements, service mobilisation and any associated operational decisions required to ensure continuity of provision.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword

3.1.1 BSFHs are a central part of Brent’s commitment to giving children the best start in life and supporting families earlier, closer to home and in a more joined-up way. The proposed insourcing of BSFH Support Services will strengthen the Council’s ability to deliver an integrated Family Hub and Early Help offer, improve accountability for outcomes and ensure resources are aligned to local need.

3.1.2 This recommendation supports the Council’s wider priorities to reduce inequalities, improve children’s outcomes, support school readiness and strengthen preventative services. It also reflects national policy direction for Family Hubs and Best Start in Life, while providing a more sustainable and cost-effective model for Brent residents.

3.1.3 BSFHs are at the heart of Brent’s Early Help community-based offer and are a priority in the Borough Plan (2023-27). The change in name from Family Wellbeing Centres to BSFHs is a requirement of the DfE as part of the national programme from 1 April 2026. The BSFHs provide an integrated ‘whole family’ (for children aged 0-18 years old, and 25 for those with SEND) service, to act as a single accessible point where families can seamlessly access integrated health, education, parenting and welfare support. This arrangement helps the co-ordination and delivery of services for more vulnerable children using contextual safeguarding approaches.

3.1.4 BSFHs act as an entry point, providing guidance and evidence based accredited interventions to prevent families' issues from escalating to crises and requiring more costly support. The ethos is grounded in prevention using a ‘whole family’ relational approach, empowering families to achieve and sustain better long-term outcomes. Locally, the services contribute directly to the Council's priorities around improving outcomes for children, reducing inequalities, supporting school readiness, strengthening parenting capacity and enabling families to access help at the earliest opportunity. The support services also underpin delivery of the Council’s Best Start in Life programme with partner agencies.

3.1.5 The Family Hub model enabled the successful delivery of the government’s Family Hub and Start for Life Programme 2023-2026. Brent was one of the initial 75 local authorities chosen to receive funding to pilot the Family Hub model. Brent’s model has been of interest to the National Family Hub Network and government departments and has received multiple visits to explore and share good practice. Building on this, the Brent BSFHs are integral to the Council’s strategy to deliver the DfE’s national Best Start in Life, Family Hub and Healthy Babies Programme. This requires all local authorities to provide BSFHs from April 2026 to meet the requirements of the national programme. The BSFHs are a key delivery point for integrating support services from maternity through the early years and align with the aims of the programme to ensure the best support is available to families in the first 1,001 days of a child’s life.

3.1.6 BSFHs contribute to delivering other national programmes such as the Families First Partnership Programme and Reducing Parental Conflict Project. The BSFHs also contribute to the successful delivery of local borough strategies including for example: the Early Years Strategy 2026-2029, the Youth Strategy 2025-2028, the Inclusion Strategy 2026-2029 and the national SEND reforms, Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2026-2029, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Black Community Action Plan.

3.1.7 The Family Hub delivery model also aligns with the Neighbourhood Health Framework (February 2026) and Neighbourhood Local Outcomes Framework (March 2026) that define the roles of ICBs, Health and Wellbeing Boards, Local Authorities and other partners in neighbourhood health development and implementation.

3.2 Background

3.2.1 The Council entered into a contract for Family Hub Support Services with Barnardo’s Services Limited (“Barnardo’s”) on 1 December 2021 (the “Contract”) for a period of three years with an option to extend for two years, on a one plus one basis, at a total estimated contract value of £3,203,917.00.

3.2.2 The current contract was originally awarded in December 2021 for five years (3+1+1) with a total value of £3.2m and provides key support functions across Brent's Best Start Family Hubs, including Family Support Assistants, Early Years Workers, volunteering support and crèche provision. The contract is due to end on 30 November 2026. However, Barnardo's has in principle agreed to enter into a new contract for a period of four (4) months from 1 December 2026 until 31 March 2027, which will provide continuity of provision for a short-term period while a new service is established. Officers are currently progressing arrangements to enter into a new short-term four (4) month contract, including completion of the Council's governance procedures to award the contract in accordance with the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

3.2.3 Barnardo's is commissioned to provide support services that enhance the delivery model across 6 Family Hubs. The support services are provided across Alperton, Church Lane, Granville, Preston Park, St Raphael's and Three Trees hubs. The BSFHs Support Services contract includes provision for Family Support Assistants, Early Years Workers, a volunteer programme and creche programme (see Table 1). The support services provided by Barnardo's are delivered within an integrated delivery model alongside Brent employed staff in each setting - the BSFH Manager, Centre Support Officer and Triage Worker.

Table 1: Contracted Barnardo's Roles and Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts

Service	FTE
Crèche Coordinator Crèche programme	0.6 (0.6 in post) Bank of 13 flexible crèche workers
Volunteer Coordinator Volunteer programme	1 (1 in post) Volunteers to work across the BSFH
Family Support Assistants (FSA)	6 (currently 6 FTE in post)
Early Years Workers (EYW)	6 (currently 5 FTE in post)
TOTAL	**13.6 (currently 12.6 in post)**

3.2.4 The current contract brings added social value benefits to vulnerable families, including for example, access to a Crisis Fund, the donation and distribution of white goods, mobile devices and data, gifts for children, food donations and access to social trips. These equated to approximately £50k in social value benefits during the 2025-26 financial year.

3.2.5 The Public Health Grant contributes £500k towards the Contract and it has been agreed to maintain this level of funding to March 2029. The remainder of the Contract is funded from the General Fund.

3.3 Options Appraisal

3.3.1 Officers have assessed three options for the future delivery of BSFH Support Services from April 2027, when the current contract comes to an end:

a) Re-tendering the service to commission an external provider

b) Bringing the majority of the service in- house

c) Ceasing the service

a) Option 1 – Re-tendering the Service

This option would involve commissioning an external provider through a competitive procurement process. It could provide an opportunity to test market interest and innovation and, as is the case with the current contract, an opportunity to secure voluntary and community sector social value. However, it would retain the current split delivery model with Council-employed staff and provider-employed staff working in BSFHs, which can create ongoing complexity in workforce management, accountability, quality assurance and consistency of practice across the hubs.

A full procurement exercise would be required to establish the true market cost of an external service. Based on indicative extension pricing provided by Barnardo's, and allowing for National Insurance and inflationary uplifts, the estimated annual cost of a tendered external model is approximately £882k from 2027/28. This is higher than the estimated cost of the proposed in-house model.

A full tendering exercise would take approximately 9 months to complete. This would be challenging to achieve within the available implementation timescale.

b) Option 2 – Bringing the majority of BSFH Support Services In-house

This option would transfer BSFH Support Services into a single Council-led delivery model. It would align the BSFH workforce under one management structure, which would support a strengthening of accountability and consistency of practice across BSFHs. It would enable resources to be deployed more flexibly in response to local need, neighbourhood working and wider reforms of the children's early help and social care system (the Families First Partnership Programme). The in-house model is also more cost effective, as existing Council management and support arrangements can absorb functions currently provided through the Support Services Contract, reducing duplication and overhead costs.

An option that will be considered is to commission the creche provision to a local VCS provider, rather than bringing this under Council management. This service includes a Creche Coordinator (0.6 FTE) and flexible Creche Workers (x10-15). The Creche enables families with young children to access services such as parenting programmes, domestic abuse support and adult learning, commissioning this provision would be achievable by 31 March 2027.

The proposed model for an in-house service is set out in Table 2. This integrates the Support Service function with existing BSFH posts that are Brent Council employees.

Table 2: Proposed In-house Staffing Model

Service	FTE
Brent employed staff	
Service Manager	1
Family Hub Managers	6
Centre Support Officers	6
Inclusion Practitioners	6
Triage Officer	6
Barnardo's employed staff	
Family Support Assistants (FSA)	6
Early Years Workers (EYW)	6
Creche Coordinator	0.6
Flexible Creche Workers	(12-15)
TOTAL	37.6 (excludes flexible Creche workers)

Indicative additional costs estimated at approximately £662K per annum from 2027/28 (see Appendix 1) which would deliver improved value for money.

c) Option 3 - Ceasing the support services

Ceasing BSFH Support Services when the current contract ends is not considered viable. The services form a core part of Brent's preventative Early Help and Family Hub offer, providing family support, early years interventions, volunteering and crèche provision that enable children and families to access support at an earlier stage. Ending the service would reduce the Council's ability to meet national Family Hub and Best Start in Life expectations, create a gap in key preventative provision and would likely increase pressure across the wider children and family's system.

3.4 Evaluation

3.4.1 The current model has a number of strengths - for example, partnership working with a national voluntary sector organisation brings additional social value benefits for vulnerable families. However, bringing the service in-house would provide greater flexibility, stronger operational control and clearer accountability as neighbourhood working across local authority services and with the health sector and integrated Early Help arrangements develop across the borough.

3.4.2 The key benefit of the in-house model is its ability to adapt alongside Brent's evolving Family Hub, Best Start in Life and emerging neighbourhood-based service delivery approaches. BSFH are highly visible community assets and important access points for family support. A Council-led model would support more consistent practice, stronger outcome oversight and more agile use of resources to meet changing local needs. The financial rationale for the preferred option is set out in section 5.

3.4.3 The proposed in-house model will build on the strengths of the existing service, including positive performance in engaging new families, increasing family contact and supporting school readiness. It will also retain a focus on value-added support for families by fast-tracking access, through Triage Officers, to Brent's wider cost of living support initiatives such as the Crisis and Resilience Fund. Officers consider that the benefits of the current offer can be retained and strengthened through a more integrated Council-led model that provides greater flexibility, clearer oversight of outcomes and improved value for money.

3.4.4 A benchmarking exercise was undertaken during 2026 of six local authorities' provision, with information gathered from the published websites of a further five. The findings indicate that only a small number of local authorities continue to operate a fully commissioned support service model and that the majority of comparable local authorities operate predominantly in-house Family Hub and Early Help support models, supplemented by targeted commissioned activity from the voluntary and community sector. The extent of voluntary and community sector involvement varies across local areas, and only one authority, Essex, was identified as operating a fully commissioned delivery model. It should be noted that direct comparison is limited by the complexity of local delivery arrangements and the limited availability of detailed staffing and contract expenditure information.

3.4.5 Officers considered whether a short pre-market engagement exercise should be undertaken to test provider interest and indicative costs. Procurement and Legal advice confirmed that a meaningful exercise would require a full and structured market engagement process, and that to obtain costs, a tender process would need to be carried out. Given the conclusion that the in-house model is the preferred option, officers do not consider that pre-market engagement would add sufficient value at this stage.

3.4.6 Subject to the financial implications set out in section 5, the in-house model is recommended as the preferred option. It provides the strongest overall balance of service quality, accountability, ability to deliver, strategic alignment and value for money for Brent residents.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 Engagement has taken place with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Employment and Climate Action and relevant senior officers to consider the strategic, operational and financial implications of the future delivery options for BSFH Support Services.

4.2 Engagement has also taken place with relevant senior staff from Barnardo's regarding the extension of the service, operational implications and potential future arrangements.

4.3 Subject to Cabinet approval, a structured consultation and communication plan will be implemented to support transition to the proposed in-house model. This will include engagement with Barnardo's, affected staff, trade unions, Council staff and relevant partners. Consultation will be undertaken in accordance with TUPE and HR requirements, with a focus on ensuring service continuity, supporting affected employees and maintaining clear communication with families, partners and stakeholders throughout the transition period.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 In December 2021, the Cabinet agreed the award of the contract to Barnardo's for 5 years (3 years with the option to extend by 2 x 12-month extensions) from 1 Dec 2021 to 30 November 2026 at a total contract value of £3.2m.

5.2 Barnardo's has in principle agreed to enter into a new contract for a period of four months from 1 December 2026 until 31 March 2027, therefore the estimated costs for the 2026/27 financial year will be the eight remaining months of Barnardo's existing contract (£433K) and four months under the new contract (£279K), a total of £712K. Sufficient funding exists to cover these costs but there are risks included in Table 3, paragraph 5.7.

5.3 Barnardo's currently holds £274K of unspent funding from previous financial years. These funds are intended to support the planned contract extension from December to March 2027. The Council is currently awaiting a formal response from Barnardo's to confirm this arrangement.

5.4 The expected value of the in-sourcing option is £662K per annum for financial year 2027/28 based on the proposed structure by the service. The current financial modelling is based on the current staffing costs of the Barnardo's contract linked to the salary bandings for the council GPC scales, including assumptions in relation to overhead costs and management capacity. A full financial analysis over 3-years is detailed in Appendix 1.

5.5 For comparison, the cost of Barnardo's delivering the service for financial year 2027/28 is estimated to be £882k per annum. This is based on Barnardo's pricing offer to extend the contract from December 2026 to March 2027 and not on a soft-market testing exercise. A full financial analysis over 3-years is detailed in Annex 1.

5.6 In terms of funding, the contract is funded by the General Fund budget and a contribution from the Public Health Grant. A new in-house service would also rely on this contribution. The Public Health Grant funding contribution is currently time-limited (3 years). Further engagement is required to confirm ongoing Public Health Grant funding post March 2029. If the service is to discontinue due to lack of funding from April 2029 onwards, there is a further risk of associated redundancy costs which would result in a pressure against the council's budgets.

<u>Risks</u>

5.7 Table 3 sets out the key risks related to the preferred option of bringing the service in-house and how they would be mitigated.

Table 3: Key risks and mitigations

Risk/issue description (incl. impact)	Planned mitigation or resolution	Owner
Staff do not want to TUPE to the Council	1. Ensure staff fully understand the benefits through good communication 2. Consultation on TUPE is timed early to allow time for recruitment to any vacant posts	Head of Early Help
A tendering process for creche facilities does not result in appointment of a third party to run them	1. Targeted market engagement to identify potential providers 2. Contingency plans to cover the service in-house	Head of Early Help
Families cannot access services as there is delay in the transfer that impacts on delivery	1. Close working with Barnardo's to focus delivery leading up to the transfer on services that have the highest uptake by families in the context of any delays.	Head of Early Help
Public Health grant funding is not confirmed beyond 2029 causing a service redesign	1. Early engagement with Public Health to confirm funding allocation 2. Consider other funding sources for services 3. Continued review of services to ensure model meets what families need.	Director, Early Help and Social Care and Director of Public Heath
Risk of delay or difficulties managing the transfer results in additional unfunded costs	1. Ensure full understanding of financial position. 2. Generate contingency arrangements to avoid duplicate costs as part of risk management	Head of Early Help

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 0-5yrs. 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 proactively and preventatively,

(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; and
Their social and economic well-being.

(c) secure integrated early childhood services by working with health, education, employment services, voluntary and community partners (sections 2-4).

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 ensure 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.'

6.4 The Council has a wide general power of competence under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything that individuals generally may do. The existence of the general power is not limited by the existence of any other power of the Council which (to any extent) overlaps the general power. The Council can therefore rely on this power to provide the services as set out in the options in this report.

6.5 In considering any recommendations, the Council should have regard to the Council's obligations to carry out its duties in accordance with the principles of best value - to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

6.6 The Council is also required to undertake appropriate consultation with stakeholders when seeking to change the mode of delivery of a legal function.

6.7 The proposed decision on the options for the future of the Best Start Family Hub contract is a matter reserved to Cabinet, as per Paragraph 10.1 (a) of Part 3 of the Constitution states "where the exercise of that function or the making of that decision would or would be likely to conflict with or result in a change or departure from any decision or policy agreed by the Council or the Cabinet, other than the determination of planning applications where the departure from the development plan is determined in accordance with section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990". Additionally, Paragraph 10.1(k) provides that a matter is reserved where the exercise of that function or the making of that decision would or would be likely in the opinion of the relevant Corporate Director or the Chief Executive to result in a very significant change in the model of service delivery. Given that the proposed decision would be a departure from a decision previously approved by Cabinet and given that this would be a significant change in the model of service delivery, it is considered that proposed decision to approve the insourcing of the BSFH Support Services is made by Cabinet.

6.8 As set out at paragraph 6.6, the Council is required to undertake appropriate consultation with stakeholders as the proposed decision pertains to changing the mode of delivery in relation to a legal function.

6.9 Any option to conduct a re-procurement exercise must comply with the Procurement Act 2023 (PA 23) and the Council's Contract Standing Orders within Part 2 of the Constitution. The services for Best Start Family Hub Support Services will be classified as "Light Touch Services" under Schedule 1 of the Procurement Regulations 2024 (the "PR 2024"), which means the procurement would be subject to the special regime for Light Touch Contracts as defined in section 9 of the PA 23. The threshold for Light Touch Services is currently set at £663,540 (including VAT).

6.10 The proposed decision to insource the BSFH Support Services will be a Key Decision, in which case the decision may not be taken unless this matter has been published on the Forward Plan. A Key Decision must be published on the Forward Plan (Paragraph 30 of the Access to Information Rules) and must be included on the Forward Plan not less than 28 days before the decision is to be made. (Paragraph 34 of the Access to Information Rules).

6.11 The Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment Regulations 2006 (TUPE) is likely to apply as there will be a continuation of the service when it is brought in-house. All affected staff who are part of an organised grouping of employees will automatically transfer to the Council on their existing terms and conditions. The Council must ensure that appropriate information and consultation obligations are complied with in relation to affected employees, and TUPE consultation should commence as soon as possible. Where employees are not dedicated to, or principally assigned to, the relevant contract, they are unlikely to fall within the scope of TUPE.

7.0 Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Local Authority 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 covered under the Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination) pregnancy and maternity, race (this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality) religion or belief (this includes lack of belief) sex and sexual orientation. Due regard means giving relevant and proportionate consideration to the duty, in that whenever significant decisions are being made consideration must be given to the impact/affect that implementing a particular decision will have in relation to equality before making that decision. Brent Council also has a policy of considering Human Rights and socio-economic impact.

7.2 An Equality Analysis has been carried out on the proposals set out in this report and is provided as Appendix 2 to this report. It is not anticipated there will be any negative impact from these proposals on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination) pregnancy and maternity, race (this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality) religion or belief (this includes lack of belief) sex and sexual orientation.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 BSFHs provide services in the community for local families, aimed at reducing the need for unnecessary travel to access support.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations

9.1 The service is currently provided by an external contractor. There is TUPE liabilities for all options considered, whether in-sourcing or undertaking a competitive tender. As the proposed decision is for in-sourcing the service, Barnardo's staff would be eligible to TUPE to the Council.

9.2 There are up to 13.6 FTE roles, plus 13 flexible creche workers (on zero contract hours), who could be subject to TUPE implications. However, the exact number will depend on current staff numbers at the time of transfer.

9.3 There could be significant additional costs, such as pensions considerations, that delay the transfer to an in-house service or onboarding a new supplier. This would involve consultation with staff.

9.4 There are no separate property implications as BSFH Support staff are based at the BSFH as part of the integrated delivery model.

9.5 There are licences to occupy for all the BSFH premises which are mandatory part of the BSFH Support Services contract with an external supplier. There are no such implications for an in-house model.

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 Subject to Cabinet approval, a clear communication strategy will be developed to support transition to the proposed in-house model and maintain confidence in the continuity of BSFH Support Services. Communications will provide timely and consistent messages to affected staff, Barnardo's, trade unions, Council teams, Family Hub managers, partners, local ward members and families using the hubs as relevant. The rationale for the change will be explained, and stakeholders will be reassured that services will continue during the transition period.

10.2 Staff will be kept fully informed of the programme of change, including consultation on TUPE arrangements and key implementation milestones.

Related document(s) for reference

Cabinet Paper – Development of Family Hubs, 14 October 2019

Report sign off:
Nigel Chapman Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Community Development
Legal considerations provided by: Elizabeth Benjamin
Finance considerations provided by: Folake Olufeko