

# Norfolk County Council

## Record of Individual Cabinet Member Decision

**Responsible Cabinet Member: Cllr Penny Carpenter (Cabinet Member for Children's Services)**

### **Background and Purpose:**

In February 2023, Norfolk County Council (NCC) was awarded up to £6.4m of one-off funding from central government to develop an extended Start for Life and family hubs approach which aims to support families from a child's conception, right through to their adult life. This programme supports our commitment as a Council to a shared ambition that Norfolk is a place where all children and young people can flourish and the Council's Better Together for Norfolk strategy.

This is a positive opportunity to build on our current prevention and early help model and extend our existing partnership work supporting families with children aged under 5 to cover those aged 0-19 (25 with SEND).

This is a decision to maintain the current early childhood and family service approach and continue to deliver the government's Start for Life and family hubs programme, to expand our existing offer and positively engage the wider partnership system to work differently in line with the delivery plan that has been approved by the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, utilising the grant allocation to the County Council.

It is also a decision to delegate decisions, including financial, in line with the delivery plan, regarding the implementation of this programme to the Executive Director of Children's Services.

### **Decision:**

**Is it a key decision?** Yes

**Is it subject to call-in?** Yes

**If Yes – the deadline for call-in is:** 4pm, Tuesday 2 January 2024

### **Impact of the Decision:**

This decision will enable families, with children from conception through to 19 (25 with SEND) to access a range of local preventative and early help support as part of Norfolk's approach to early childhood and family support incorporating the Start for Life offer and family hubs approach, reflecting our

shared ambition that Norfolk is a place where all children and young people can flourish.

**Evidence and reason for the decision:**

This is an opportunity to build upon the partnership approach that is being taken forward across the Council, health, providers, and voluntary sector services to strengthen our prevention and early help offer for families and support a shared ambition that Norfolk is a place where all children and young people can flourish.

The programme aligns to the Council's Better Together for Norfolk strategy with its vision that Norfolk is a place where everyone can start life well, live well and age well, and where no one is left behind, and for communities to feel safe, healthy, empowered and connected, their individual distinctiveness respected and preserved.

**Alternative options considered and rejected:**

The County Council has already committed to delivery of the Start for Life and family hubs programme and is utilising the grant funding received from the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care.

This commitment was given having secured positive endorsement from the respective Cabinet Members for Children's Services and Health and Wellbeing, the ICB Executive Lead, and local partners and providers.

The Council now needs to deliver the requirements of the programme, taking full account of national guidance, and as reflected within the comprehensive and detailed delivery plan which has been approved by the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care.

**Financial, Resource or other implications considered:**

There are no unbudgeted financial implications for the Council's budget as the current programme of transformation is being funded through the Start for Life and family hubs grant received from central government until March 2025.

**Record of any conflict of interest:**

None

**Background documents:**

No

**Date of Decision:** 21/12/23

**Publication Date of Decision:** 21/12/23

**Signed by Cabinet Member:**

I confirm that I have made the decision set out above, for the reasons also set out.

**Signed:** Cllr Penny Carpenter

**Print name:** Cllr Penny Carpenter

**Date:** 18/12/2023

**Accompanying documents:**

Norfolk's Start for Life and family hubs programme - Decision making report.

Once you have completed your internal department clearance process and obtained agreement of the Cabinet Member, send your completed decision notice together with the report and green form to [committees@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:committees@norfolk.gov.uk)

# Individual Cabinet Member Decision Report

**Item No:**

**Report Title: Norfolk's Start for Life and family hubs programme**

**Date of Meeting: N/A**

**Responsible Cabinet Member: Cllr Penny Carpenter** (Cabinet Member for Children's Services)

**Responsible Director: Sara Tough, Executive Director Children's Services**

**Is this a Key Decision? Yes**

**If this is a Key Decision, date added to the Forward Plan of Key Decisions: 17 November 2023**

## **Executive Summary / Introduction from Cabinet Member**

This report outlines the progress being made to implement Norfolk's approach as a result of the Council signing up to the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care funded Start for Life and family hubs programme on 20 October 2022.

Following Central Government's announcement in April 2022, that Norfolk was one of 75 local authority areas in England pre-selected to be part of the Start for Life and family hubs programme being led by the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care, the County Council signed up to the programme on 20 October 2022 given that it supports our shared ambition that Norfolk is a place where all children and young people can flourish and therefore is integral to our wider partnership work to strengthen our prevention and early help offer for families and our Local First Inclusion programme focused on developing our response to children with special educational needs.

As a result, the County Council is receiving up to £6.4m of transformation funding for the period up to 31 March 2025, to enable the development of a Start for Life and family hubs approach that supports families with children aged 0-19 (25 with SEND), with the majority of funding (£4.7m) ringfenced to enhancing our existing Start for Life offer in partnership with the healthy child programme and midwifery. This is support and services available for parents and carers who are expecting a baby or have a baby under the age of two.

Whilst our current early childhood and family service is focused on provision for families with children aged under 5, the family hub approach described by the Department for Education/Department of Health and Social Care is about joining up

a wide range of support services and outreach support for families with children aged 0-19 (25 with SEND), including for example, wellbeing and mental health support, employment assistance, and activities for older children and teenagers, (this is in keeping with central government reforms around children and young people to become more multi-agency).

Given the large, dispersed geography of the county, we have been very clear that our approach is about taking support out to where families live. We have moved away from a large building-based hub model to one that has the right mixture of physical hubs in relevant locations and virtual networks of professionals who provide direct outreach help. This is enabling us to build on and further extend our existing early childhood and family service approach alongside health visiting and midwifery, so it becomes fully multi-agency in nature as part of an extended and wider offer for families with children aged 0-19 (25 with SEND).

In line with our existing partnership Prevention and Early Help Strategy, it is an approach grounded in community engagement and partnership, working closely with local organisations and agencies to provide a wider range of joined-up services tailored to the needs of families in their area, in places that families already access. As a result, no new building has been created for this purpose.

It is a significant and complex programme of work which is being led by Children's Services as a partnership transformation programme, overseen by a multi-agency steering group which reports into the Children and Young People Strategic Alliance via the Prevention and Early Help Board.

## **Recommendations:**

**To maintain the current early childhood and family service approach and continue to deliver the government's Start for Life and family hubs programme to expand our existing offer and positively engage the wider partnership system to work differently in line with the delivery plan that has been approved by the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, utilising the grant allocation to the County Council.**

**To delegate decisions, including financial, in line with the delivery plan, regarding the implementation of this programme to the Executive Director of Children's Services.**

### **1. Background and Purpose**

1.1. In October 2021, as part of the Autumn budget, the Government announced £302m to transform Start for Life and family hub services in 75 upper-tier local authorities across England, to fund a network of family hubs, Start for Life and family help services, including breastfeeding services, parenting programmes and parent-infant mental health support.

1.2. As part of the programme being led by the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care, local authorities were pre-selected based on levels of income deprivation and a focus on bringing investment to areas with the greatest need, alongside a desire by central government to

see a spread across local authority areas based on their Rural Urban Classification.

- 1.3. In April 2022, it was confirmed that Norfolk was one of the 75 local authority areas pre-selected to be part of the programme, as one of six Predominately Rural local authorities across England.
- 1.4. In July 2022, we were notified that we could expect a total indicative allocation for the Start for Life and family hubs programme of between £5.98m and £6.36m over three financial years (2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25).
- 1.5. In August 2022, the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care published guidance<sup>1</sup> to support the 75 eligible local authorities to roll out their Start for Life and family hubs programme.
- 1.6. On 20 October 2022, the County Council's Leader, Chief Executive, Executive Director of Children's Services, Chair of Norfolk's Health & Wellbeing Board, Director of Public Health and Chief Finance Officer formally signed up to the programme on behalf of the County Council, having secured positive endorsement from the respective Cabinet Members for Children's Services and Health and Wellbeing, the ICB Executive Lead, and local partners and providers.
- 1.7. Signing up to the programme required confirming our commitment to the programme and of our ability to deliver the requirements of the programme as detailed in the guidance issued by the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care. There was full confidence in this given that the programme supports our shared ambition that Norfolk is a place where all children and young people can flourish and therefore is integral to our wider partnership work to strengthen our prevention and early help offer for families.
- 1.8. Given that it includes a focus on improving access to support for families from lower socio-economic groups, families of children with special educational needs and disabilities, or those from groups who experience exclusion, it also aligns with our Local First Inclusion programme, which includes developing school and community teams to ensure that children with special educational needs are receiving the right support.
- 1.9. On 8 June 2023, we received confirmation that the actual Start for Life and family hubs programme grant allocation for Norfolk will be up to £6.4m for the period of December 2022 to March 2025.
- 1.10. To date, we have received three grant payments, in January 2023, March 2023, and June 2023, totalling £2.91m, with further payments of £1.33m expected within 2023/24 and £2.16m within 2024/25. All future payments are conditional on the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care being satisfied with our ongoing programme progress and grant spend.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-hubs-and-start-for-life-programme-local-authority-guide>

- 1.11. Whilst there is transformation funding allocated to enable the development of a family hubs approach to support families with children aged 0-19 (25 with SEND), the majority of funding (£4.7m) is ringfenced to enhancing our Start for Life offer, detailing the support and services available for parents and carers who are expecting a baby or have a baby under the age of two, including:
- Parenting support
  - Perinatal Mental Health and Parent-Infant Relationship support
  - Infant Feeding support
  - Establishing a Parent and Carer Panel
  - Publishing our Start for Life offer
  - Additionally, parents and carers of children aged 3-4 will be able to access support for their children's learning and development within the home.
- 1.12. The remaining element (£1.7m) of the one-off funding from central government is ringfenced to enable the development of adopting a family hubs approach, and to support local transformation activity as a partnership over the period up to March 2025, with a focus on providing high-quality, joined up family focused support that is clear and simple to access, delivered where families with children aged 0-19 (25 with SEND) live and in locations that they find accessible, complemented by online and digital support.
- 1.13. This constitutes a significant and complex programme of work which is being led by Children's Services as a partnership transformation programme, over three years, from April 2022 to March 2025, with a phased approach to implementation that is being overseen by a multi-agency steering group which reports into the Children and Young People Strategic Alliance via the Prevention and Early Help Board, ensuring there is robust multi-agency governance and oversight, and is intrinsically aligned to our Local First Inclusion programme and early childhood and family model to ensure strategic coherence.
- 1.14. A core programme team has been established, led by Children's Services, and there has been excellent ongoing support from colleagues across the Council, the ICB and partner agencies to help deliver required activities in line with Norfolk's fully costed programme delivery plan which has been approved by the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care and is being closely monitored through our regular reporting to, and monthly meetings with the relevant teams within these central government departments.
- 1.15. Through these regular meetings, and engagement by colleagues in a variety of national webinars and groups, we have received positive feedback from the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care about our progress in implementing the programme, including a request for Norfolk to be cited as an example of good practice in relation to developing our Start for Life and family hubs theory of change. A case study of our approach is published on the Government commissioned Anna Freud Centre for Family Hubs<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [National Centre for Family Hubs](#)

- 1.16. Norfolk has also been cited as an example of best practice within the Government's report 'Publishing your Start for Life offer'<sup>3</sup>, specifically relating to our use of the Just One Norfolk digital platform to inform and support parents through the Start for Life period.
- 1.17. In line with programme requirements, we are submitting regular certification of grant usage to the Department for Education, signed by NCC's Chief Executive and approved by Head of Internal Audit and the Chief Finance Officer, and which, to date, have been positively received by the Department for Education.
- 1.18. To date (30 September 2023), since commencing the programme in December 2022, £1.93m of the total grant has been spent, as confirmed via our 2022/23 Statement of Grant Usage and 2023/24 Interim Statement of Grant Usage reports to the Department for Education. A further £1.7m has been committed, either through contracts with providers or raised purchase orders. There is an expectation that the grant funding is used within each of the financial years it is allocated for.

## **2. Proposal**

- 2.1 To maintain the current approach to the delivery of early childhood and family services, being enhanced and expanded utilising the Start for Life and family hubs programme, in line with the delivery plan that has been approved by the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, utilising the grant allocation to the County Council.
- 2.2 To delegate decisions, including financial, in line with the delivery plan, regarding the implementation of this programme to the Executive Director of Children's Services.
- 2.3 To bring an update report on Norfolk's developing 0-19 offer incorporating the requirements of the Start for Life and family hubs Department for Education funded programme to the People and Communities Select Committee during 2024.

## **3. Impact of the Proposal**

- 3.1 We have produced a comprehensive and detailed delivery plan which sets out our partnership vision, with the intended outcomes and associated metrics required of our model.
- 3.2 Our vision remains clear that any grant funded initiative must support our shared ambition that Norfolk is a place where all children and young people can flourish and is integral to our wider partnership work to strengthen our prevention and early help offer for families with additional needs.

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<sup>3</sup> Publishing your Start for Life offer - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))



- 3.3 Our approach will secure high-quality, joined up family focused support that is clear and simple to access, delivered on an outreach basis where families with children aged 0-19 (25 with SEND) live and in locations that they find accessible such as libraries or community venues, in accordance with our early childhood and family service approach. This approach is coordinated and delivered through an outreach model from an existing site in each district area, currently used by families which will be described as a family hub, complemented by online and digital support that enables individuals and families to access the information and advice they need 24/7.
- 3.4 These include the Early Childhood and Family Service bases in Thetford, Gorleston in Great Yarmouth, Catton Grove in Norwich, North Walsham, and Long Stratton, alongside the St Augustine Healthy Living Centre in King's Lynn, and Hellesdon Community Centre.
- 3.5 Our parenting support for families who are expecting a baby or who have children aged 0-2s will ensure all parents in Norfolk receive the support they need, when they need it, and in the way that best meets their needs, to help make the transition to parenthood as smooth as possible, providing them with skills and confidence to sustain sensitive, responsive caregiving.
- 3.6 Our perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships offer will ensure all parents (including fathers and co-parents) of children from conception to the child's 2nd birthday, are able to easily access evidence-based support, in the way which best meets their needs, for mild to moderate perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationship difficulties.
- 3.7 Our infant feeding offer will drive forward the implementation of the Norfolk Breastfeeding Strategy and move further to develop a Norfolk Infant feeding strategy. The Breastfeeding Strategy's vision to support families and all agencies to champion, celebrate, normalise, support, and protect breastfeeding will be at the heart of the offer, with specific goals of increasing breastfeeding rates post 6-8 weeks and in enabling more people who are less likely to commence or sustain breastfeeding to do so.
- 3.8 Our home learning environment programme will ensure that children aged 3-4 years old are supported to achieve their learning and development milestones, through developing the wider use of evidence-based interventions and accessible resources as part of a more flexible delivery model adapted to meet individual needs.
- 3.9 Publishing our extended Start for Life offer will ensure that all new families and those with children below the age of 2 have the information they need to know and understand the services that are available to them and how to access them.
- 3.10 Our Parent and Carer Panel will be at the heart of engagement in the Start for Life offer and is being developed with parents and carers to ensure that a

dynamic approach is taken, including having an inclusive community of panel members that is able to reach into and represent the thoughts and views of parents and carers from a range of backgrounds and life experiences. The Parent and Carer Panel will directly impact on the further development of the offer into the future.

- 3.11 Our approach is enabling us to build on the work already happening to support families with children up to the age of 19 (25 with special educational needs and disabilities) within local communities. This includes working with community groups and in the places that families already go, such as community supermarkets or libraries, where families access information, advice, and guidance. This way of working is ensuring that families can receive support that is better coordinated and is meeting all of their needs as a family.
- 3.12 Resources for families have been brought together online, so that it is easier for them to access information, advice, and guidance, either through the Council's website or via the Just One Norfolk platform:  
[www.norfolk.gov.uk/familyhubs](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/familyhubs) and <https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/family-hubs>
- 3.13 The programme is supporting agencies and organisations to adopt an approach that addresses the needs of the whole family, not just the child or young person, and provide support that is tailored to their individual circumstances. It is also about adopting a relationship-based practice approach, building trusting and respectful relationships with families and empowering them to achieve positive change.
- 3.14 The programme is helping to embed the use of evidence-based interventions and assessments to support families across a range of issues, such as parenting, infant feeding, early language, school attendance, financial challenges, domestic abuse, parental conflict, and mental health; using data and intelligence to identify families who may benefit from early help and targeted support, and to monitor and evaluate the impact of the offer.
- 3.15 Whilst any venues designated as family hubs are operating as a point of coordination for agencies, with some direct delivery onsite, it is important to note that the emphasis is on taking services and support out to where families live and delivering support in a range of local spaces such as libraries or community centres, which is the Norfolk model.
- 3.16 Through the programme, we are investing in a wide range of multi-agency workforce development for staff across agencies and organisations working with children, young people, and families, alongside also investing in the recruitment and training of peer support volunteers, who will provide additional support to families in their local communities.
- 3.17 This is supporting the development of a skilled and integrated early years and family workforce that is better able to respond to the needs of the whole family, regardless of professional background, so that more families are

benefiting from joined-up early support, only having to tell their story once and are working with trusted professionals.

- 3.18 Partnership Groups are being established to assess local needs and identify local priorities for families with children aged 0-19 (25 with SEND), with parents and carers playing a pivotal role in planning, decision making, quality assurance and evaluation of services.
- 3.19 Additionally, the lived experiences of parent and carers, shared via the Norfolk Parent and Carer Panel, are helping to shape and develop services, particularly in relation to our systemwide early years Start for Life offer.

## **4. Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

- 4.1 The County Council has committed to endorse and support a shared ambition that Norfolk is a place where all children and young people can flourish.
- 4.2 The proposal aligns to the Council's Better Together for Norfolk strategy with its vision that Norfolk is a place where everyone can start life well, live well and age well, and where no one is left behind, and for communities to feel safe, healthy, empowered and connected, their individual distinctiveness respected and preserved.
- 4.3 It will build upon the partnership approach that is being taken forward across the Council, health, providers, and voluntary sector services to strengthen our prevention and early help offer for families.

## **5. Alternative Options**

- 5.1 Given that the programme supports our shared ambition that Norfolk is a place where all children and young people can flourish and therefore is integral to our wider partnership work to strengthen our prevention and early help offer for families, the Council has formally committed to deliver the requirements of the programme as detailed in the guidance issued by the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care.
- 5.2 This commitment is underpinned by a comprehensive and detailed delivery plan which has been approved by the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care and is being closely monitored through our regular reporting to, and monthly meetings with the relevant teams within these central government departments.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 This transformation programme is being funded through the grant to Norfolk County Council. Given the scale of the funding being received, agreement to utilise the grant, as outlined in this report, constitutes a Key Decision.

6.2 Care is being taken to ensure that the grant funding is being utilised in ways that build capacity and capability across agencies, rather than simply introducing time limited new services, so that our approach is sustainable beyond March 2025.

## **7. Resource Implications**

**7.1 Staff: none**

**7.2 Property: none**

**7.3 IT: none**

## **8. Other Implications**

**8.1 Legal Implications: none**

**8.2 Human Rights Implications: none**

**8.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) (this must be included):**

The programme team has completed a detailed equality impact assessment which is being used to inform delivery of the programme.

**8.4 Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA): none**

**8.5 Health and Safety implications (where appropriate): none**

**8.6 Sustainability implications (where appropriate): none**

**8.7 Any Other Implications: none**

## **9. Risk Implications / Assessment**

9.1 Whilst there was agreement nationally to roll forward underspend from 2022-23 due to the limited timeframe between December 2022 when delivery plans were approved by the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care and the end of the financial year, the current position is that underspends in 2023-24 will not be able to be carried over. The programme

team is therefore working hard to ensure that the available funding is fully deployed in a timely way.

9.2 Progress is dependent however upon capacity within teams to progress work at pace, alongside existing and sometimes competing priorities and work requirements. The grant funding is being used to create additional capacity where possible, not least to ensure our Start for Life and family hubs programme continues to be developed as a partnership approach.

9.3 In common with the financial context for all of the 75 local authorities engaged with this programme, there is a risk that cost pressures on the Council, the ICB, and our delivery partners will prevent the continuation of Norfolk's Start for Life and family hubs approach, currently being supported through the programme grant, beyond March 2025. This is being mitigated in Norfolk by using a significant part of the grant to raise capability and build resilience within the multi-agency workforce supporting families, to build in sustainability beyond the grant funded period.

## **10. Select Committee Comments**

10.1 The intention is to bring an update report on Norfolk's developing 0-19 offer incorporating the requirements of the Start for Life and family hubs Department for Education funded programme to the People and Communities Select Committee during 2024.

## **11. Recommendations**

**To maintain the current early childhood and family service approach and continue to deliver the government's Start for Life and family hubs programme to expand our existing offer and positively engage the wider partnership system to work differently in line with the delivery plan that has been approved by the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, utilising the grant allocation to the County Council.**

**To delegate decisions, including financial, in line with the delivery plan, regarding the implementation of this programme to the Executive Director of Children's Services.**

## **12. Background Papers**

12.1 Record of Individual Cabinet Member Decision

If you have any questions about matters contained within this paper, please get in touch with:

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