

DECISION REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE

From: **Christine McInnes, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education**

Dr Anjan Ghosh, Director of Public Health

To: **Christine Palmer, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**

Diane Morton, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Subject: Best Start Family Hub Programme Grant Award

Decision no: 25/00109

Key Decision :

- It affects more than 2 Electoral Divisions
- It involves expenditure or savings of maximum £1m – including if over several phases

Classification: Unrestricted

Future Pathway of report: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: All

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary: In July 2025, the government launched the Best Start in Life Strategy alongside their commitment to invest £500m for the national roll out of Best Start Family Hubs; subsequently, a 3-year Programme is starting on 1 April 2026. A series of Key Decisions by the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services accepted the original 4-year transformation grant funding for Family Hubs and adopted our new Family Hub service model.

The existing Key Decisions do not extend beyond the initial 4-year transformation period which ends on 31 March 2026. Therefore, a new Key Decision is required to accept the additional 3-year grant funding and to utilise that funding in line with the service model adopted under the Best Start Family Hub Model

This decision is for the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services but is reported to the Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet committee for information as public health are responsible for aspects of this grant.

Recommendation(s):

As Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health (subject to receiving confirmation from the Department for Education (DfE) and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), I agree to:

- a) **APPROVE**, the acceptance of the Best Start Family Hub Grant Award and the deployment of the grant funding in accordance with the grant conditions and the adopted service model;
- (b) **DELEGATE** authority to the Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services and Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health to agree the terms and conditions to enter into the necessary grant agreements;
- (c) **DELEGATE** authority to the Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services and Director of Public Health to deliver the requirements of the grant;
- (d) **DELEGATE** authority of required expenditure to the Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services and Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, to be managed in line with Council procurement rules;
- (e) **DELEGATE** authority to the Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services and Director of Public Health, to take other necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into contracts or other legal agreements, as required to implement the decision.

1. Introduction

1.1 Within the Spending Review in June 2025, the Chancellor announced continued investment in the Family Hub Programme. In July 2025, the government launched the Best Start in Life Strategy alongside their commitment to invest £500m for the national roll out of Best Start Family Hubs; consequently a 3-year Programme is starting on 1 April 2026.

1.2 On 7 November 2025, the Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) announced that the provisional allocation for the Best Start in Life Programme for Kent County Council is

£15,354,500, for financial years 2026-29. The DfE and DHSC will share guidance on the service and delivery expectations ahead of April 2026.

1.3 A series of Key Decisions by the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services accepted the original transformation grant funding for Family Hubs and adopted our new Family Hub service model. A new Key Decision is required to adopt the Best Start Family Hub Model and to accept funding for the 3-year programme.

2. Key Considerations

2.1 The Government's commitment to the Family Hub model has been reconfirmed by the announcement of a further 3 Year funded Programme for Family Hub authorities.

2.2 DfE and DHSC have confirmed that programme strands are a continuation of the current Strands, with the exception of the 'Healthy Babies Offer', which has changed from 'Start for Life Offer':

- Programme
- Capital
- Perinatal Mental Health & Parent Infant Relationships
- Parenting Support
- Infant Feeding
- Home Learning Environment
- Parent Carer Panels and Healthy Babies Offer

2.3 The funding covers the 3-year financial period 2026-2029 for local authorities to:

- Establish and deliver Best Start Family Hubs
- Develop and implement Best Start Local Plans
- Provide core services, including evidence-based parenting and home learning environment support.

2.4 The Government's strategy 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life', sets out the importance of supporting every child and family through their early years, laying the foundations for future success. The strategy includes a commitment to ensure that nationally 75% of 5-year-olds achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Assessment by 2028.

2.5 The £15,354,500, for financial years 2026-29 will help Kent achieve the statutory target set out as:

- a) The proportion of children in Kent County Council achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the 2027/28 academic year is at least 77.0%; and
- b) Disadvantaged children have benefitted at least equally from this improvement; that is, that the proportion of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the 2027/28 academic year is at least 57.7%

2.6 The option to not accept the grant money has been considered. Given the financial challenges the Council currently faces, and the statutory target for children in Kent to achieve a Good Level of Development by the end of the academic year 2027/28 it is not considered appropriate to decline the further funding from the DfE and DHSC. Final assessment will be dependent on a consideration of the deliverability of the requirements of any agreement required with the DfE and DHSC

to access the funding, along with a review of how far any such requirements align with the established Family Hub programme operating in Kent.

2.7 While understanding the risks associated with a late announcement of the delivery requirements, on a practical level, the Council must plan and prepare for the likelihood of it being necessary to accept the additional funding to ensure the greatest possible access to funding to support children, families and communities in the best way possible.

2.8 Announcement of the specific delivery requirements accompanying the funding is expected ahead of April 2026. However, a delay in the acceptance of the grant money poses a risk that the time available to spend the money and achieve the delivery requirements is reduced. This report seeks to explain the timing and staging of potential decision-making in the event that the final assessment of the requirements are appropriate for Kent. Therefore, endorsement of the principle of accepting the grant money and utilising it in line with the delivery requirements set out by the DfE and DHSC is sought now, to maximise our ability to mobilise resources to implement additional service requirements or procure services at the relevant time. Failure to do so will pose a risk to the delivery of services and cause a reputational risk for Kent County Council and poor outcomes for the children and families of Kent.

2.9 This report recommends that the review of the delivery requirements and how the funding can be utilised in line with the DfE constraints is delegated to the Director of Integrated Children's Services and the Director of Public Health in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

2.10 The proposed decision supports 'Reforming Kent', specifically aim 3 'Supporting Residents that need Help', by embedding prevention and early intervention within service delivery. Family Hubs provide accessible, integrated support for parents/carers and children, helping families address challenges before they escalate and empowering them to make informed choices that improve health and wellbeing. By investing in services that promote parenting skills, perinatal mental health, parent-infant relationships, infant feeding and home learning environment, Family Hubs also provide information to help reduce dependency on crisis interventions and ensure every child has the opportunity to grow up safe, secure, and supported, and help families stay together.

3. Background

3.1 In October 2022 the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services took decision 22/00094 and Kent County Council (KCC) signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department for Education (DfE) which accepted the initial 3-year transformation grant funding. This decision set out the requirement for the development of detailed proposals, public consultation and appropriate governance ahead of a further Key Decision on the Family Hub model.

3.2 In November 2023, after the development of detailed proposals, public consultation and appropriate governance, KCC Cabinet took decision 23/00092 to implement the Family Hub model across the county.

3.3 Alongside the Decisions in October 2022 and November 2024, two additional decisions were taken relating to the Start for Life expenditure for Perinatal Mental Health and Parent Infant relationships (decision 23/00075) and for Infant Feeding (decision 23/00076).

3.4 In March 2025, the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services took [Decision 24/00124](#) and Kent County Council (KCC) signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department for Education (DfE) which accepted the Year 4 Family Hub grant. This grant funding will end on 31 March 2026.

4. Options considered and dismissed, and associated risk

4.1 The option to not adopt the Best Start Family Hub Model and not accept the grant money has been considered. If the announcement related to the conditions on how the grant is to be used is made in quarter 4 of financial year 2025/26 (i.e. in February 2026) it will likely impact on the Local Authority's ability to mobilise resources to implement additional service requirements or procure services. This in turn, will pose a risk to the delivery of services and cause a reputational risk for Kent County Council.

4.2 While understanding the risks associated with a late announcement, we have discounted the option of not accepting the additional funding in recognition that children, families and communities in Kent will benefit from additional support and because Kent still needs to deliver on the statutory target for children to achieve a Good Level of Development whether it accepts the money or not.

4.3 Final determination of whether the Best Start Family Hub model can and should be accepted, and whether the funding can and should be accepted would be dependent on the terms and conditions associated with the model and funding – these will be reviewed at the point of decision.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The DfE and DHSC have announced that the provisional funding allocation for the Best Start in Life Programme for Kent County Council is £15,354,500, for financial years 2026-29. The distribution of Kent's funding allocation by Programme Strand is set out in the table below.

5.2 While the delivery expectations of the grant are not yet known, the Programme Strands are a continuation of the current Strands, with the exception of 'Healthy Babies Offer', which has changed from 'Start for Life Offer'.

5.3 It is expected that the funding will support the ongoing delivery of Family Hubs in a way that complements and enhances existing services. This is a ring-fenced grant and based on current understanding, the grant is not expected to place additional pressure on the Council's revenue or capital budgets. There is no expected cost to the General Fund from accepting this grant. Additionally, DfE has confirmed that Best Start funding may be used for delivery of existing Family Hub services which could replace a portion of the budget currently funded from the

General Fund. Therefore, Kent Integrated Children's Services is proposing as part of the 2026-29 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to use a portion of this funding for existing staff that are already delivering these services (subject to grant terms & conditions). Therefore, if this grant is not accepted, an alternative saving would have to identified as part of the MTFP process.

Strand	% ¹	2026-27 Allocation ²	2027-28 Allocation	2028-29 Allocation
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - programme	21%	£1,186,800	£970,500	£996,600
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - capital	5%	£237,400	£242,100	£246,800
Parenting support	23%	£1,165,500	£1,180,000	£1,231,800
Home learning environment support	17%	£839,600	£850,000	£887,400
Perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships	24%	£1,237,900	£1,237,900	£1,237,900
Infant feeding support	10%	£504,400	£504,400	£504,400
Healthy babies offers and parent and carer panels	1%	£31,000	£31,000	£31,000
Total		£5,202,600	£5,015,900	£5,135,900

¹ The distribution of funding has been rounded to one decimal place. The sum of percentages across strands may not total 100% due to this rounding.

² The allocation for 2026-27, 2027-28, 2028-29 has been rounded to the nearest 100 pounds. The sum of the allocations across strands may not total the maximum funding allocation due to this rounding.

6. Legal implications

6.1 There is statutory Guidance, namely 'Working Together to Safeguard children 2023' that outlines how organisations and individuals should collaborate to protect children from harm. Local authorities are one of a number of key partners. The focus within the Guidance is on the "whole family approach" to provide support and help for families to stay together safely and to provide such help as soon as problems emerge to prevent them from escalating. The Guidance is statutory, meaning it must be followed unless there is good reason not to.

6.2 The statutory Guidance in the context of the Family Hub programme, aligns with duties under both the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004. The 1989 Act creates a family focus to support families with children in need. The Children Act 2004 established a duty for agencies, including local authorities, to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

7 Equalities implications

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was completed in March 2025 alongside [Decision 24/00124](#). An updated EqIA will be completed in advance of the final decision and will accompany the paperwork to Cabinet Committee. At this stage there are no anticipated adverse impacts that are associated with the acceptance of the grant.

8 Data Protection Implications

8.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) is not expected to be required for the acceptance of the Best Start Family Hub grant money; however the relevant screening assessment will be undertaken prior to decision.

9 Other corporate implications

9.2 There are no corporate implications linked with accepting the grant funding.

10 Governance

10.1 Acceptance of the Best Start Family Hub grant money is an executive decision of the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, building on previous Family Hub decisions and recognising the clear connections between Children's Services and the Public Health activities delivered to communities across Kent via Family Hubs. The core principles and planned approach are presented for Cabinet Committee consideration to support a final decision when full details are known.

10.2 The final decision to accept the grant money will be taken by the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, subject to review of the terms and conditions when they are made available. The full implications and considerations will be detailed in the relevant published reports at the point of decision, in accordance with normal KCC decision-making processes.

11 Conclusions

11.1 Following the initial 4- year funded transformation period, the DfE has confirmed a further 3 years of Family Hub grant funding, under the Best Start Family Hubs Programme. A Key Decision is required to accept the 3-year Best Start Family Hub grant funding and to enable the spend of the grant money when the grant period begins in April 2026. Any delay to accepting the grant money, or the governance around the acceptance poses a risk to the Council's ability to spend the money and implement Best Start Family Hub Services.

11.2 As set out above, in normal circumstances, the detailed proposals for accepting and deploying the Best Start Family Hub funding would be set out for Cabinet Committee consideration. However, while the detail is not yet available from DfE and DHSC, this item provides an opportunity to consider the implications of additional funding and for the Cabinet Committee to provide their views to the Cabinet Member on key considerations to inform their final decision.

11.3 Any acceptance of the funding will involve commitments to deliver Best Start Family Hubs in a certain way and until the details are available from the DfE and DHSC, it is not possible to make the required final assessment on whether it is appropriate for KCC to enter into the relevant agreements. Given the likely benefits to

the community that may be realised via any additional funding, it is sensible to prepare and scope plans for the acceptance and deployment of the additional funding in advance of the final decision-making.

Decision(s):

As Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health (subject to receiving confirmation from the Department for Education (DfE) and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC)) I agree to:

- a) **APPROVE**, the acceptance of the Best Start Family Hub Grant Award and the deployment of the grant funding in accordance with the grant conditions and the adopted service model;
 - (b) **DELEGATE** authority to the Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services and Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health to agree the terms and conditions to enter into the necessary grant agreements;
 - (c) **DELEGATE** authority to the Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services and Director of Public Health to deliver the requirements of the grant;
 - (d) **DELEGATE** authority of required expenditure to the Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services and Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, to be managed in line with Council procurement rules;
 - (e) **DELEGATE** authority to the Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services and Director of Public Health, to take other necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into contracts or other legal agreements, as required to implement the decision.
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12. Background Documents

- 12.1 The Government's [Giving every child the best start in life](#) strategy provides information on their ambition to improve child development and meeting their goal of 75% of 5-year-olds in England having a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028.
- 12.2 [Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK](#) gives every practitioner working in a multi-agency system clarity about what is required of them individually and how they need to work in multi-agency partnerships to deliver effective services, support and help to children and their families.

13 Appendices

Record of Decision (RoD)

14 Contact details

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