

EQIA Submission – ID Number

Section A

EQIA Title

Best Start Family Hubs

Responsible Officer

Emma McCaughan - CY OICS

Approved by (Note: approval of this EqIA must be completed within the EqIA App)

Ingrid Crisan - CY OICS

Type of Activity

Service Change

No

Service Redesign

No

Project/Programme

Project/Programme

Commissioning/Procurement

Commissioning/Procurement

Strategy/Policy

No

Details of other Service Activity

No

Accountability and Responsibility

Directorate

Children Young People and Education

Responsible Service

Operational Integrated Children's Services

Responsible Head of Service

Ingrid Crisan - CY OICS

Responsible Director

Ingrid Crisan - CY OICS

Aims and Objectives

- March 2025 Update:

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 roll out of Best Start Family Hubs; consequently a 3-year Programme is starting on 1 April 2026.

On 7 November 2025, the Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health and Social Care DHSC) announced a provisional allocation for the Best Start in Life Programme for Kent County Council is £15,354,500, for financial year 2026/27.

This funding will come with updated Delivery Requirements and a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which is expected to be released ahead of April 2026. The purpose of this Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is to provide a new assessment for the previous EqIA, given the additional grant money.

It is expected that local authorities are already delivering services set out in the initial 4 Years of the programme. The Family Hub model brings together the strongest elements of the current Family Hub and old Sure Start Children's Centres approaches. DfE and DHSC have confirmed that programme strands for Best Start Family Hubs are a continuation of the current strands, with the exception of the 'Healthy Babies Offer', which has changed from 'Start for Life Offer'. The age range for Parenting Support has moved from 0-2 to 3-4 years, however Kent will continue to delivery parenting support for a further 2 years.

The delivery strands are:

Programme

Capital

Perinatal Mental Health & Parent Infant Relationships

Parenting Support

Infant Feeding

Home Learning Environment

Parent Carer Panels and Healthy Babies Offer

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.

The funding will also 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 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%

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA):

This EQIA is intended to assess the potential impact of our decisions on persons with different protected characteristics. In particular, this EQIA has been prepared to help us to have regard to the need to: (i) eliminate discrimination; (ii) advance equality of opportunity; and (iii) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic who do not, in the exercise of our public functions. These issues are relevant considerations to be taken into account when a new policy, function, or system change is being proposed in the exercise of our public functions. This EQIA is also evidence that these considerations have in fact been taken into account, and the weight given to them as part of our decision-making process.

Case for change – Best Start Family Hub programme:

Family Hubs are about bringing together and integrating support services for children, young people, and families so that they are easier for people to access and to allow families to tell their story once and receive support from the right person at the right time. Best Start Family Hubs will support Kent in achieving the statutory GLD targets.

Summary of proposals:

In September 2020, a DfE and DHSC review of outcomes for babies and the first 1001 days of a child's life, led to the development of a framework for local authorities to work with health partners and develop a Start for Life concept for the first 25 years (25 years with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities [SEND]) Family Hub model.

This model was adopted in Kent and Best Start Family Hubs provides an opportunity to build on and enhance our existing services.

We know that reducing health inequalities and improving health and wellbeing requires organisations to closely work together. Through the Best Start Family Hub programme, KCC seeks to continue to deliver the best outcomes through a hybrid model of universal and targeted support for children, young people, and their families, delivering services identified through the Family Hub guidance.

Our goals for the Best Start Family Hub model are to continue to:

- Offer support to all parents and carers: from the early stages of preparing to become a parent, and throughout the child's first two years and beyond
- Reduce inequalities in health, wellbeing, and education
- Create a supported, capable workforce who work in partnership with families
- Ensure families are listened to
- Provide targeted, timely and accessible support to those in greatest need
- Support teenagers as they move into adulthood
- Provide services based on evidence and need

The Best Start Family Hub Programme supports 'Reforming Kent', specifically aim 3 'Supporting Residents that need extra support' 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 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 reduce dependency on crisis interventions and ensure every child has the opportunity to grow up safe, secure, and supported so families stay together.

Delivery must proactively evidence the best value for money in decision making. Sustainability and best value are a key focus to ensure services can be delivered beyond the life of the Family Hub grant and elements will work within KCC's new business requirements.

The Family Hub approach delivers joined up whole family services across each district. This model will be used to explore arrangements with co-located partners and ensure a consistent model for Best Start in Life partnership across the district.

Summary of Options for Consideration:

Option 1: Do not accept the 3-year Best Start Family Hub grant money from DfE and DHSC

This would mean the Local Authority would continue to deliver Family Hub services within the existing base budget. The community won't benefit from additional improvements to the current service delivery. If option 1 is chosen then there will be no change to the service that KCC already delivers, therefore there will be no impact on persons with different protected characteristics.

Option 2: Accept the 3-year Best Start Family Hub grant money and deliver the mandatory enhanced services set out in the Best Start in Life Strategy and DHSC. We will continue to deliver a 0-19 (25 SEND) Family Hub model offering enhanced services only in the District areas set out in the following Key Decisions taken by the Cabinet Members for Integrated Children's Services and Adult Social Care and Public Health;

Infant Feeding 23/00076

Parenting Support - 23/00081

Home Learning Environment - 23/00082

Perinatal Mental Health - 23/00075

Families will still have access to Family Hub staff members who will be able to offer them assistance in finding the services they need to access local services through signposting only.

If option 2 is chosen then there will be a positive impact to under fives and their parents, as well as pregnancy and

services, as we will be enhancing the existing service as outlined above.

Our preferred option is Option 2 to accept the year grant money in particular given the financial pressures that Ken Council is facing. This option will allow us to continue to deliver the Family Hub services and to enhance and improve service.

Summary and justification:

We consider that the different options for member consideration will have differing levels of impact on groups with characteristics

Within the umbrella of the Family Hub model there is a collation of a wide range of services for families to improve and access to them. There will be no changes to the way we deliver services and the current locations and therefore any anticipated impacts on the service users.

The Family Hub model seeks to reduce inequalities and had increased engagement of underserved groups through participation activity such as Parent Carer panels. We are committed to continue to ensure services are developed communities therefore we will have targeted participation activity to develop the Family Hub model of services.

The Family Hub model developed more peer to peer groups with those with lived experience, for example SEND peer support and fathers groups. This will be supported by staff to help set up and support through use of spaces within Hub sites.

On consideration of the impacts, we feel the proposal are justified through the increased access to provision, information services across the Family Hub model. All activities need to be balanced against our Best Value Duty, ensuring the activity is sustainable and can be delivered beyond the life of the Best Start Family Hub grant and work within KCC's new budget requirements.

Section B – Evidence

Do you have data related to the protected groups of the people impacted by this activity?

Yes

It is possible to get the data in a timely and cost effective way?

Yes

Is there national evidence/data that you can use?

Yes

Have you consulted with stakeholders?

Yes

Who have you involved, consulted and engaged with?

The decision to accept the 3-year Best Start Family Hub grant money has been discussed at Strategic Reset Program and Start for Life and Family Hub Board. It was recommended that KCC would proceed with the documentation required to accept the grant money, subject to review of the updated delivery requirements and terms.

Has there been a previous Equality Analysis (EQIA) in the last 3 years?

Yes

Do you have evidence that can help you understand the potential impact of your activity?

Yes

Section C – Impact

Who may be impacted by the activity?

Service Users/clients

Service users/clients

Staff

Staff/Volunteers

Residents/Communities/Citizens

Residents/communities/citizens

Are there any positive impacts for all or any of the protected groups as a result of the activity that you are doing?

Yes

Details of Positive Impacts

Acceptance of the 3-year Best Start Family Hub funding will continue to have the positive impacts as outlined below model currently being delivered.

There are no anticipated negative impacts from accepting the funding, as existing services will be maintained and enhanced to improve reach and accessibility. This includes placing an even greater emphasis on outreach to engage communities, and supporting those who may be digitally excluded.

Examples of the positive impacts we have seen — and will continue to see — from the Family Hub model for service protected characteristics include:

- Increased information and support for fathers-to-be and fathers/male carers
- Increased support for mothers and fathers with perinatal mental health challenges and the different gender impacts
- Easy to navigate digital and virtual offers for pregnant parents on a wider range of services
- Increased support and access to Infant feeding support for mothers and fathers/male carers
- Increased information for parents/carers on child development at early years and adolescent development
- Targeted support for parents of children with additional needs or disabilities
- More peer to peer groups led by those with lived experience eg SEND peer support groups
- Targeted engagement of underserved groups to help further develop the Family Hub model eg for families where second language.

Negative impacts and Mitigating Actions

19. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Age

Are there negative impacts for age?

No

Details of negative impacts for Age

Not Applicable

Mitigating Actions for Age

Not Applicable

Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions – Age

Not Applicable

20. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Disability

Are there negative impacts for Disability?

No

Details of Negative Impacts for Disability

Not Applicable

Mitigating actions for Disability

Not Applicable

Responsible Officer for Disability

Not Applicable

21. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Sex

Are there negative impacts for Sex

No

Details of negative impacts for Sex

Not Applicable

Mitigating actions for Sex
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Sex
Not Applicable
22. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
Are there negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender
No
Negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
Not Applicable
23. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Race
Are there negative impacts for Race
No
Negative impacts for Race
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Race
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Race
Not Applicable
24. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Religion and belief
Are there negative impacts for Religion and belief
No
Negative impacts for Religion and belief
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Religion and belief
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Religion and Belief
Not Applicable
25. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Are there negative impacts for Sexual Orientation
No
Negative impacts for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
26. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Are there negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity
No
Negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
27. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

Are there negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
No
Negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
28. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities
Are there negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities
No
Negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Carer's responsibilities
Not Applicable