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To: Scrutiny Committee – 23 September 2026

Subject: Kent Family Hubs – impact, effectiveness and sustainability

Classification: Unrestricted

1. Background and purpose

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Committee is considering whether Kent's Family Hubs model is achieving its intended outcomes, reaching families with the greatest levels of need, providing consistent access across the county, delivering value for money and operating sustainably.
- 1.2 This report responds to the 12 questions identified by Members of the Scrutiny Committee. For each question, it sets out the evidence currently available and explains what this indicates. Where a fuller conclusion cannot yet be drawn, this is generally because the relevant information has not previously been collected or reported in a directly comparable way, or because the contribution of Family Hubs cannot be separated readily from that of the wider system.

2. Kent Family Hubs offer and operating model

- 2.1 Kent's Family Hubs provide a whole-family offer for children and young people aged 0–19, and up to 25 for young people with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). The model brings together access to parenting support, infant feeding, home learning, SEND information, mental health support, adolescent services, family advice and community-based support through physical hubs, outreach, digital access and partner delivery.

3. Impact, performance and reach

- 3.1 Q1. What evidence is available to demonstrate that Family Hubs are improving outcomes for Kent's children, young people and families, and how do those outcomes compare with those achieved through the Children's Centres model that Family Hubs replaced? Decision - 23/00092 - Kent Family Hub Model - Implementation - Kent County Council - Council & Democracy**

- 3.1.1 The Family Hub model was introduced following Kent's transition from Children's and Youth Centres to a whole-family, 0-19 (25 SEND) integrated model aligned to the Department for Education Best Start Family Hub framework. The model provides integrated access to parenting support and family advice through a network of services and partners.
- 3.1.2 The rationale for changing the model was:

- To replace separate Children's Centre and Youth Hub arrangements with an integrated **0–19 offer, extending to 25 for young people with SEND**.
- To provide a clearer single point of access to Kent County Council and partner services.
- To combine universal and targeted support across buildings, outreach and digital channels.
- To improve integration between youth provision, family support, health, public health and other partners.
- To meet the Department for Education (Department for Education) and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) Family Hub requirements and secure approximately £11 million of transformation funding.
- To make better use of a reduced estate while extending access through outreach, community sites and digital provision.

3.1.3 Within the available resource, the revised model also sought to define more clearly the interventions offered and focus targeted support where evidence and local need indicated it would have the greatest impact.

3.1.4 A direct comparison with the former Children's Centre model is therefore challenging to make. Changes in service scope, age range, recording systems and wider policy context mean that data is not directly comparable. There is less resource, but it is more targeted, so the service may be reaching less people overall, but is targeting those families who most need the support.

3.1.5 Kent's priority has been to measure and report to the Department for Education on Best Start Programme level indicators. The key measure is the Good Level of Development (GLD) rate, which is the percentage of children who, at the end of the Reception year, achieve the expected level across specified areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage. A child has a GLD when they meet the expected level in communication and language, physical development, personal, social and emotional development, literacy and mathematics. It is an indicator of school readiness. This reflects the combined influence of children's early experiences, family circumstances, early years education, schools, health services and Best Start Family hubs support.

3.1.6 Improvements in GLD rates across Kent are therefore relevant to the Family Hub programme but cannot be fully attributed to Family Hubs' work alone and may take several years to become fully evident following changes to early-help provision.

3.1.7 Kent's Good Level of Development (GLD) rate increased from 68.9% in 2025 to 74% in 2026. This is a positive system-level indicator consistent with the aims of the Family Hub programme.

3.1.8 Kent's GLD rate for children eligible for free school meals improved by almost four percentage points from 2025 to 2026. This improvement is particularly relevant because reducing inequalities and reaching families with higher levels of need are key objectives of the Family Hub model.

- 3.1.9 The Early Writing Project, delivered in 25 schools, achieved an average 12.3 percentage-point increase in Good Level of Development outcomes. These results reflect Kent's Best Start Local Plan activity and should not be attributed solely to Family Hubs. However, they provide relevant evidence of progress within the integrated system to which Family Hubs contribute.
- 3.1.10 The Family Hub model has brought early years, school-age and adolescent support into a more integrated whole-family framework. It has strengthened the offer for children aged 5–11, expanded parenting support for families with children aged five and over, and provided a clearer and more evidence-based youth offer, including targeted provision such as Compass programme. It also brings together SEND information and support up to age 25, digital access and delivery through community and partner networks.
- 3.1.11 In December 2025, Kent County Council has commissioned 31Ten to provide an independent review into barriers to engagement with the Family Hub and Start for Life offer, particularly among underserved groups. The research included 42 Early Help and Children's Social Work staff, 20 family interviews and a small countywide survey. The review provides evidence about access, family experience and barriers, but it was not designed as a before-and-after comparison of Family Hubs and Children's Centres.
- 3.1.12 Kent Safeguarding, Professional Standards and Quality Assurance Unit, Family Hubs and Management Information are developing a Kent Family Hubs performance framework to measure performance beyond the Department for Education Start for Life agenda. It is establishing baselines and trend measures for the current model and, where elements of historic data are sufficiently comparable, it will show change from the previous arrangements.

3.2 Q2. What are the key performance indicators for Family Hubs, and what do current performance trends tell us about their effectiveness?

- 3.2.1 The Department for Education management information return is the principal external reporting requirement for Family Hubs. It covers four broad areas: system and service delivery; workforce activity and partnership working; service use, reach and demographic characteristics; and parent and child outcomes for funded services, including infant feeding, perinatal mental health and parent–infant relationships.
- **Sites and delivery:** openings, closures, co-location, whether sites meet the Department for Education definition, and services delivered through hub buildings, partner networks, outreach and community settings.
 - **Workforce:** staffing, volunteers, collaboration and participation in programme-funded training.

- **Reach and participation:** service activity, usage, demographic characteristics and Parent Carer Panel activity.
- **Start for Life services and outcomes:** infant feeding, perinatal mental health, parent–infant relationships, parenting support and service-specific outcomes where local or commissioned-provider data are available.

3.2.2 The latest quarterly **Department for Education Management Information Return** for quarter 1 of 2026-27 provides a picture of the scale and breadth of activity delivered through Kent's Family Hub network:

- 9,594 users accessed Kent's Best Start Family Hubs during the quarter, with figures available across all Family Hub locations and a method used to discount repeat visits.
- 15 Parent Carer Panel meetings took place, with 39 parents and carers participating. Feedback from parents and carers was used to influence service design and delivery.
- 7,412 users accessed the EasyPeasy parenting app, all through online delivery.
- 3,712 people accessed Stay and Play provision, with a further 310 accessing SEND Stay and Play sessions and 59 accessing dedicated dads' sessions.
- 3,366 children received a two-year review incorporating an early-language identification measure.
- 1,515 people accessed Baby Groups, and 736 accessed Baby Massage provision.
- 956 people accessed the specialist infant feeding service, including 337 through online delivery, and 565 accessed National Children's Trust infant feeding groups.
- 591 people accessed parenting support, including 175 accessing SEND parenting support.
- Wider activity delivered through the Family Hub network included 356 users of universal and targeted youth services, 243 users of wider mental health services, 114 users of domestic abuse support, 16 users of debt, money and welfare advice, and three users of substance misuse support.

3.2.3 These figures reflect different measures, including unique users, service users and attendances, and some individuals may have accessed more than one service. They should therefore not be combined into a single overall total. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the breadth of support delivered and provide an emerging baseline for monitoring reach and participation over time.

3.2.4 The wider reporting timetable also includes the Best Start Local Plan update, grant return, maturity self-assessment and annual delivery plan.

All returns are subject to internal governance and assurance before submission.

3.2.5 Performance can also be considered at four connected levels:

3.2.5.1 **Individual evidence and outcomes:** feedback, pre- and post-intervention measures and follow-up evidence show participants' experience and whether change is sustained.

3.2.5.2 Examples include the Strengthening Family Relationships parent evaluation which included 42 pre-workshop surveys, 18 post-workshop surveys and 12 one-month follow-up interviews. Parents reported greater understanding of the effect of conflict on children, improved perspective-taking, calmer communication and a stronger focus on children's needs. They also described improvements in co-parenting arrangements and valued practical tools, including workbooks, planners, calendars and videos presenting conflict from a child's perspective. Participants reported applying the learning across different family circumstances, including separation and parenting children with SEND.

3.2.5.3 A further example, children who completed Your Direction (a course specifically for children whose parents are separated), all reported improved wellbeing scores.

3.2.5.4 **Intervention, activity and service performance:** activity, repeat attendance, completion and programme outcomes show reach, engagement and effectiveness.

3.2.5.5 For example, from 1 January to 30 June 2026, there were 2,288 SEND stay-and-play attendances by 521 people and 1,373 Youth Voice attendances by 107 children and young people, demonstrating repeat engagement.

- 80 people completed one-to-one or face-to-face Reducing Parental Conflict interventions
- 87 people completed Triple P for Baby.
- 43 people completed Strengthening Family Relationships workshops.
- Six children completed the Your Direction online course. All showed improved wellbeing scores and reported that the course would help them speak to their parents constructively.

3.2.5.6 **Workforce development and reach:**

The Department for Work and Pensions Reducing Parental Conflict programme illustrates the information available for this performance measure. In 2025–26, 746 staff across Integrated Children's Services undertook Strengthening Family Relationships or Court Ready development, including 349 Strengthening Family Relationships completions, 265 Court Ready completions, 165 train-the-trainer

completions and 115 attendees at a one-off seminar, demonstrating substantial workforce reach.

3.2.5.7 The Strengthening Family Relationships evaluation provides strong evidence of impact. It found sustained improvements in practitioners' understanding of parental conflict and its effect on children, their ability to identify and respond to conflict, their use of programme resources and their confidence in holding sensitive conversations and supporting improved communication and co-parenting.

3.2.6 Workforce development opportunities are also offered across the wider Family Hub Network, including Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) partners. During the current financial year this includes:

- Six cohorts of *Togetherness: A Solihull Approach* training, supporting a consistent, evidence-based approach to parenting support across Kent.
- Two cohorts of Makaton training, helping practitioners and partners develop more inclusive communication skills and improve accessibility for children and families with additional communication needs.

3.2.6.1 **Population-level evidence:** wider indicators show trends across Kent and inequalities between groups.

3.2.6.2 For example, Kent's Good Level of Development rate increased from 68.9% in 2025 to 74% in 2026, with an improvement of almost four percentage points for children eligible for free school meals. These indicators are relevant to the programme but reflect the contribution of the wider system and cannot be attributed to Family Hubs alone.

3.2.7 Taken together, the evidence indicates strong workforce reach, repeat engagement in some services and positive outcomes within selected interventions. However, evidence is not yet equally mature across all ways of measuring performance, or at population level, or comparable with previous models of delivery (such as Children's Centres).

3.2.8 The developing Kent Family Hub performance framework intends to bring qualitative and quantitative evidence together more consistently and establish baselines. Final measures, data-quality standards and reporting thresholds are currently being tested and agreed.

3.3 Q3. How does the Council assess whether Family Hubs are successfully reaching families with the greatest levels of need, including those who may not traditionally engage with support services?

3.3.1 Kent assesses reach by comparing information about local need with evidence about who is using services. Community profiles and local needs analysis identify the size, characteristics and distribution of local populations, including areas of deprivation, rural isolation, population growth and communities that may experience barriers to access. Local

Children's Partnership Groups add intelligence from schools, health services, voluntary and community organisations and other partners about emerging needs, gaps in provision and families who may not be visible through Family Hub attendance data alone.

- 3.3.2 Parent Carer Panels provide valuable qualitative feedback from parents and carers about their experience of Family Hub services, including whether the offer is clear, accessible, welcoming and responsive to family needs. They can help identify practical barriers, test communications and proposed service changes, and involve families in shaping delivery.
- 3.3.3 Online and hybrid Parent Carer Panels are intended to reduce barriers associated with travel, childcare, working hours and attending an unfamiliar venue, making it easier for a wider range of parents and carers to participate, including from home, encouraging involvement from those who would find an in-person meeting difficult to attend. However, Panel members are generally already connected to Family Hubs or related services. Their feedback provides important evidence about the experience of current service users but cannot on its own establish whether the wider population is aware of the offer or explain why families who have never engaged do not access it.
- 3.3.4 Kent considers Panel feedback alongside independent research, community outreach, partner intelligence and targeted engagement with underserved or seldom-heard groups. The diversity and representativeness of Panel membership is monitored, with active recruitment of fathers and male carers, families from minority ethnic communities, families with SEND, rural and coastal communities, and others who may be under-represented.
- 3.3.5 In the last three quarters, 411 people engaged with Parent Carer Panels. Of those whose ethnicity was recorded, 63.64% were White British, meaning 36.36% were from other recorded ethnic groups. This indicates that the Panels are engaging a sizeable and ethnically diverse group of parents and carers. Since September 2025, 174 parents and carers have participated in Parent Carer Panel activity. The majority of participants were female (147), with 26 male participants and one participant whose gender was not recorded.
- 3.3.6 Parent Carer Panels provide a mechanism for families to influence service design and delivery. Feedback gathered through these panels has informed a range of service improvements. For example, parents requested more information about support available following the birth of a baby, which resulted in signposting to multilingual Togetherness parenting courses and additional one-to-one support through Stay and Play services. Feedback about difficulties accessing local groups led to the introduction of outreach Stay and Play sessions in community locations. Parent feedback has also informed targeted work with fathers and male carers, including the co-design and commissioning of a podcast series for new fathers, evening engagement sessions to enable working fathers to contribute to service development, greater promotion of father inclusive

activities, and the recruitment of local fathers to help shape parenting content and resources.

- 3.3.7 Parent and community feedback has also informed wider inclusion activity. For example, concerns about barriers facing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities led to community outreach events, improved signposting to support services, and cultural competency training for Family Hub staff, helping services become more accessible and responsive to the needs of local communities.
- 3.3.8 In line with Department for Education expectations, an Outreach Framework is being developed to identify and better understand communities that are currently underrepresented in Family Hub services. The framework is being co-produced with partners and informed by the lived experience of families. It will identify local needs, workforce development requirements and engagement approaches, whilst providing a flexible model that can be tailored at district level to reflect the needs of individual communities.
- 3.3.9 Partnership referrals, the Family Hub Network, and Health Visiting help identify families who may benefit from support and provide routes into Family Hub services. Targeted outreach tests whether adapting the location, timing, communication or method of delivery improves access for groups who are less likely to attend a main hub building.
- 3.3.10 Taken together, these sources allow the Council to assess whether service use broadly reflects the needs and demographics of each district, identify groups or places that appear under-represented, and adapt outreach and delivery in response.
- 3.3.11 The developing performance framework is intended to strengthen this assessment by comparing participation and outcomes by district and population group. It will consider not only initial attendance, but also whether families return, complete courses, take up onward support and report improved outcomes. This will provide a more meaningful assessment of reach than total attendance figures alone.
- 3.3.12 Additionally, the Family Hubs Practice Development and Quality Assurance function has developed a service specific Quality Assurance Framework to provide systematic assurance that the Family Hub model is operating safely, consistently and effectively across Kent, and that its delivery remains focused on accessible, integrated and earlier support for children and families. Year 1 has deliberately concentrated on safeguarding and partnership delivery, establishing the essential baseline from which the quality, reach and impact of the wider offer can be assessed. Through a common methodology comprising district self-assessments, reflective safeguarding conversations, staff focus groups, focused practice observations, building and health and safety assurance, and district feedback, the programme has quality assured ten of the twelve districts to date, with the remaining visits scheduled for completion by October 2026. This work has created the first consistent countywide

picture of safeguarding practice within Family Hubs and has identified both effective practice and recurring variations.

- 3.3.13 Year 1 has also demonstrated that the framework is an active improvement mechanism rather than a review process alone. Findings have been converted into district Next Steps Plans, management follow-up, thematic governance reporting and targeted practice development. They have informed the introduction of the Record of Concern process, the development and rollout of Family Hub Safeguarding and Child Protection Guidance, strengthened due-diligence arrangements for the Family Hub Network, clearer expectations for partner use of hub premises, improved review of Local Management Agreements and risk assessments, and the design of the Year 2 Quality Assurance Framework methodology.
- 3.3.14 The Practice Development and Quality Assurance function provides the oversight and continuity across this cycle by co-ordinating multi-agency evidence, identifying cross-district themes and ensuring that learning is translated into service improvement and is visible through governance.
- 3.3.15 Building on this established safeguarding and partnership baseline, Year 2 will introduce a modular Quality Assurance Framework comprising defined Lines of Enquiry selected through evidence, cross-district learning and service priorities. Across the programme, data deep dives will be combined with targeted sampling, practitioner and family experience, partner feedback, moderation and improvement planning to assess reach, access, quality, impact and outcomes. This wider model will examine whether families with the greatest levels of need are represented in service use, why particular groups or communities remain under-represented, and whether changes to outreach, communications, venues, digital provision or partnership routes improve access and sustained engagement.
- 3.3.16 Repeated quality assurance beyond Year 2 will provide a stronger longitudinal view of whether identified barriers reduce, improvement actions are embedded and the Family Hub offer delivers equitable reach, consistent quality and measurable benefit.
- 3.3.17 **Independent research:** In December 2025, an independent review by 31Ten examined barriers to engagement with the Family Hub and Start for Life offer, particularly among underserved groups. The research included 42 Early Help and Children's Social Work staff, 20 family interviews and a small countywide survey.
- Family participants included five fathers or male carers, six Asian parents and two care leavers. No Gypsy, Roma or Traveller families were recruited. Findings relating to this group were therefore drawn from staff evidence, demographic analysis and published research rather than direct testimony.
 - The review found that the key barriers were around transport, working hours, childcare, language barriers, digital exclusion, difficulty finding information, fear of judgement, lack of confidence entering unfamiliar

buildings or established groups, and environments that may not meet the needs of people with SEND or neurodivergence.

3.3.18 The review indicated that the factors supporting access were trusted relationships, flexible times and locations, supported introductions, community outreach, whole-family provision, and welcoming and inclusive environments.

3.3.19 These findings subsequently informed improvements to Kent's approach to reaching families who have not traditionally engaged with services, including more targeted outreach, delivery through trusted community settings, supported introductions, more flexible access, clearer communication and tailored engagement with underserved groups.

3.4 Q4. What impact, if any, have Family Hubs had on demand for more intensive services, such as children's social care, crisis intervention services and SEND support?

3.4.1 Family Hubs aim to reduce escalation by helping families access support earlier through parenting programmes, infant feeding support, SEND advice, home learning activities and integrated family support.

3.4.2 It is unlikely to be possible to attribute changes in demand for Children's Social Care, crisis intervention or SEND support to Family Hubs alone. Demand is shaped by many interacting factors, including population change, deprivation, levels of need, referral thresholds and practice, wider service capacity, national policy and the contribution of health, education, Early Help and community services. Families may also receive support from several parts of the system at the same time. Even with stronger long-term and comparative data, any assessment would therefore demonstrate the contribution of Family Hubs within the wider system rather than establish a simple causal relationship.

3.4.3 The Council holds information on wider service demand as well as Family Hub activity and outcomes. The developing performance framework is intended to bring these sources together more consistently, including indicators such as re-referrals to Early Help and Children's Social Care after families had accessed Family Hub services. Baselines, follow-up data and comparison with wider demand trends will strengthen the evidence about whether Family Hubs are contributing to earlier support and reduced escalation. These measures should be interpreted as evidence of contribution, not proof that Family Hubs alone caused any change in demand for more intensive services.

3.4.4 For example, recorded activity provides evidence of the scale of earlier SEND-related support. From 1 January to 30 June 2026, Kent's Power BI data show:

- 2,288 attendances by 521 people at SEND stay-and-play sessions.
- 434 interventions providing support services for children with SEND.

- 803 SEND parenting-support interventions.
- 967 sensory-room interventions.
- 460 families accessed speech and language programmes (Little Talkers, The Communication Tree, Making it Real)

3.4.5 These figures demonstrate that Family Hubs are providing accessible SEND-related support at scale, including support that may help families before needs escalate. They do not, however, establish the effect on statutory referrals, crisis demand or the need for more intensive SEND services.

3.5 Q5. How is the Council ensuring that there is consistent access to, and quality of, Family Hub services across all areas of Kent, including rural and coastal communities?

3.5.1 Kent operates a countywide model with:

- A defined core offer.
- Common service standards.
- Practice Framework.
- Quality Assurance Framework.
- Workforce development programme.
- Audit and peer review arrangements.
- Performance scorecards.

3.5.2 Local delivery is adapted through district planning, network sites, outreach and digital access. The December 2025 31Ten review confirmed why this matters. Transport and rural access were prominent barriers, including an example of a parent with two young children facing a 40-minute walk to the nearest hub. Families also described practical barriers associated with working hours, childcare, confidence in entering unfamiliar buildings and difficulty finding clear information.

3.5.3 Kent has used these findings to strengthen delivery beyond the main Family Hub estate. Network sites, schools, libraries, community venues and voluntary, community and faith organisations provide more familiar and accessible settings. Some Family Hubs are co-located with libraries, enabling families to access support in a familiar, non-stigmatising community setting that they may already use for books, activities, information or digital access. Co-location can increase awareness of the Family Hub offer, support informal engagement and make it easier for families to move between library resources and Family Hub support in one visit. Districts can also use drop-ins, targeted community activity, supported introductions and outreach in rural or underserved areas where families may be unable or reluctant to attend a hub building. This approach is intended both to bring support closer to families and to use trusted local relationships and community facilities as routes into the wider Family Hub offer.

- 3.5.4 Digital access is a complementary part of this model rather than a replacement for face-to-face support. Families increasingly expect to be able to find information, book services and use appropriate online resources at a time that suits them. Digital provision can offer access 24 hours a day, including during evenings and weekends, and may reduce barriers associated with travel, working patterns, childcare and anxiety about attending an unfamiliar setting.
- 3.5.5 Kent Family Hub has continued to strengthen its social media presence, with increases in both follower numbers and content reach across the countywide Kent Family Hub social media accounts and district-level channels. This growth has expanded the programme's ability to communicate with parents, carers and families, improving awareness of available services, activities and support.
- 3.5.6 The increase in audience engagement demonstrates the effectiveness of social media as a key communication channel for promoting the Family Hub offer, supporting targeted campaigns, and directing residents to local services. Growing digital reach also supports the programme's objective of ensuring families can easily access information and connect with support within their communities.

Measure	September 2025	September 2026	Change
Followers	61,334	69,721	+13.67%

- 3.5.7 An increase of 13.67% in followers over the past year demonstrates steady and sustained growth in the Kent Family Hubs social media audience. This indicates ongoing success in attracting new followers each month and increasing the visibility of Family Hub services.
- 3.5.8 To further strengthen awareness of the Family Hub offer, Kent Family Hub has established a dedicated LinkedIn channel for professionals. The new channel will support professionals in identifying and promoting appropriate services, enabling them to signpost families more effectively to local support. It is also expected to increase awareness and understanding of the Family Hub offer amongst the family hub network and practitioners, helping to strengthen engagement with services and improve access to support for families across Kent.
- 3.5.9 Virtual tours of Family Hubs are also available to help families see the layout, facilities and environment before visiting. This can make the setting more predictable and familiar, helping to reduce uncertainty and build confidence for people who may feel anxious about entering an unfamiliar building.
- 3.5.10 Between 19 April 2026 when the pages went live on the website and 30 June 2026, the virtual tours received 290 page views from 123 users. User engagement data indicates that visitors actively explored the content, with 428 clicks recorded across desktop and mobile devices. Interactions involved opening information accordions to access additional details about

Family Hub facilities and services, demonstrating that users are engaging with the information provided to better understand what to expect before visiting.

3.5.11 Kent is strengthening its Family Hub website and online directory, online booking, digital parenting and relationship-support resources, translated information and hybrid participation arrangements. Co-located libraries can also provide access to computers, internet connectivity and staff support for families who may otherwise experience digital exclusion. Where a family needs personal support, lacks digital access or confidence, or prefers face-to-face help, staff and partners can provide navigation, outreach or an introduction to local provision.

3.5.12 Further consistency and assurance are provided through the Family Hubs Quality Assurance Framework, overseen and co-ordinated by the Family Hub Practice Development Team within the Safeguarding, Professional Standards and Quality Assurance Unit.

3.5.13 Data on need, uptake and outcomes will be considered in quality assurance activities alongside the experience of families, practitioners and partners to establish whether the core offer is accessible and delivered to a comparable standard across Kent, including in rural and coastal communities. Where barriers or differences are identified, targeted practice development and follow-up assurance activities will test whether improvements have been embedded and variation has reduced.

3.5.14 Kent has established a credible infrastructure for consistent access and quality services while retaining the flexibility to respond to district need. Full assurance will depend on performance and quality information showing that families in different parts of Kent experience equitable access to the core offer and comparable standards of delivery and outcomes.

3.6 Q6. How are Family Hubs meeting the needs of children aged over eight and young people, and what services are specifically targeted at these age groups?

3.6.1 Family Hubs are not a building-only or early-years-only model but are part of a wider integrated local offer for children, young people and families. Kent's model includes a specific 11-19 offer alongside the early years and network offer. Support includes:

- Youth activities and targeted youth provision.
- Support for parents and carers of adolescents.
- Online-safety programmes for children, young people and families.
- SEND information, guidance and routes to support up to age 25.
- Mental health information, signposting and referral pathways.
- Youth participation through Youth Voice and Speak Out Youth.
- Targeted interventions reflecting local need, including Compass and substance-misuse support.

- 3.6.2 The previous Youth Hub model provided substantial support for young people aged 11 and over. The improvement under Family Hubs is stronger integration across age groups, an enhanced 5–11 offer, wider parenting support for families with older children and a more clearly defined, evidence-based youth offer, including targeted programmes such as Compass.

For the period from 1 January 2026 to 30 June 2026, data for specific activities for the 8+ age group demonstrates meaningful reach and repeated engagement:

- 5,386 attendances by 1, 479 children accessing ‘activities for older children and young people’
- 149 attendances by 59 young people (aged 11-19) at online safety sessions
- 57 attendances by 27 children (aged 7-11) at online safety sessions
- 16 interventions for young people with substance misuse
- 414 interventions ‘support for parents/carers of adolescents’
- 1,373 attendances by 107 children and young people for Kent Youth Voice sessions
- 255 attendances by 60 children in ‘Speak Out Youth’ sessions
- Six Your Direction completions, all with improved wellbeing scores.

- 3.6.3 The Youth Peer Mentor Programme provides young people with structured, positive volunteering opportunities and training that support their personal development and education and career goals. It empowers young people aged 14–18, and up to 25 for those with SEND, to play an active role in their communities by supporting other young people and providing peer support through Family Hubs and the wider community.

- 3.6.4 Youth Peer Mentors receive comprehensive training and volunteering experience designed to improve learning outcomes and develop resilience, confidence, self-esteem and leadership skills.

- 3.6.5 There are currently 33 active or onboarding Youth Peer Mentors across Kent.

3.7 Q7. Where support cannot be provided directly through a Family Hub building, what outreach arrangements are in place and how effective have they been in reaching families?

- 3.7.1 Family Hub support is delivered beyond the main hub estate through network sites, libraries, schools, community and faith venues, partner-led groups, targeted outreach and digital services. These routes bring support closer to where families live, provide access in familiar settings and reduce barriers associated with travel, working hours, childcare, unfamiliar buildings and mistrust of statutory services. Supported introductions, including joint visits or a trusted worker accompanying a family, can also help people move from outreach into the wider offer.

- 3.7.2 Available evidence illustrates both the range of outreach and, in some cases, the practical response it has generated.
- 3.7.3 Family Hub staff worked with residents at the Brotherhood Wood Traveller site through community events delivered with health, education, Citizens Advice, Fire and Rescue and voluntary-sector partners. This relationship-based approach generated identifiable follow-up: requests for parenting support, interest in a weekly stay-and-play group, support with a school admission and home-safety visits. This provides practical evidence that outreach in a trusted setting can identify unmet need and create routes into support.
- 3.7.4 Communication boards in parks using pictures, symbols and words make early-language and communication support available in everyday community spaces without requiring an appointment or attendance at a Family Hub. They are intended to support children with speech, language or additional communication needs, children who use visual prompts and families who use English as an additional language. The Family Hub Board has recognised their contribution to accessibility and awareness.
- 3.7.5 To maximise impact, speech and language data was used to identify areas of greatest need and inform the placement of the communication boards across Kent. A dedicated webpage to support the communication boards launched in August 2026 and has already received 180 views, demonstrating early interest and engagement with the resource. This targeted approach helps ensure that resources are available within communities where they are most likely to benefit children and families.
- 3.7.6 Locations of 13 boards: Ashford: Victoria Park, Noakes Meadow, Bulleid Place; Folkestone and Hythe: Randor Park, Cheriton Park, Canterbury Road Recreation Ground; Gravesham: Gordon Promenade, Rosherville Recreational Space, Woodlands Park; Tonbridge and Malling: Taddington Valley; Tunbridge Wells: Sherwood Road Play Area, Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, Oak Road playground.
- 3.7.7 Libraries, network sites, schools and community venues extend the physical reach of the offer beyond the main Family Hub estate. They provide familiar, accessible and less formal settings, can reduce travel barriers and enable families to connect with support through organisations they already know. Library co-location can also provide access to computers, internet connectivity and staff assistance. For example, Read, Play, Grow (a group to support Peri-natal Mental Health and Speech and Language) is delivered monthly at Folkestone Library and has led to an increase in families accessing Family Hub services, particularly those from Eastern European backgrounds. Compass, a course to support emotional well-being for 11-19 year olds, is delivered in all secondary schools across Folkestone and Hythe, ensuring young people from across the district can access this service even if they are unable to attend the hubs.

- 3.7.8 Kent Family Hub continues to strengthen its digital offer, with the Family Hub website providing a central access point for information, advice and support for families across Kent, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Between September 2025 and September 2026, the website recorded 91,512 sessions and 150,218 page views, representing increases of 17,580 sessions and 24,502 page views compared with the previous year, demonstrating growing awareness and engagement with online Family Hub content. The website continues to support families by improving access to information, services and local support through a single, accessible online platform.
- 3.7.9 Online information, booking, parenting and relationship-support resources provide access outside standard opening hours and can reduce barriers associated with travel, work and childcare. Continuing to improve access to services through the online booking system, enables families to search for and reserve places on activities, courses and support sessions at a time convenient to them. The online booking landing page has received 7,638 views, demonstrating significant use of the digital platform.
- 3.7.10 Virtual tours allow families to see the layout and facilities before attending, helping to make an unfamiliar setting more predictable and build confidence, please see data above.
- 3.7.11 Kent Family Hub has expanded its digital parenting offer through its YouTube channel, increasing support for families across the county. The channel hosts a range of resources designed to improve parental confidence, promote positive family relationships and support children's development.
- 3.7.12 The YouTube channel includes the *Dad Chat* podcast series, which provides honest, real-life conversations about becoming a dad, life with a new baby, mental health, relationships and accessing support. By tackling topics that can often be difficult to discuss, the series encourages engagement with support services, promotes family wellbeing and increases awareness of the wider Family Hub offer.
- 3.7.13 The channel also features the *Tiny Triumphs* playlist, a collection of short animations that help parents and carers recognise the importance of everyday interactions in supporting children's development. Through child-led storytelling, the animations demonstrate how talking, playing, listening and responding to children can strengthen communication, confidence, wellbeing and learning outcomes and a lasting impact on a child's development.
- 3.7.14 In addition, infant feeding animations provide accessible and practical guidance to families during the early years, supporting parents to make informed decisions and access appropriate help when needed.
- 3.7.15 Together, these digital resources extend the reach of Family Hub services beyond physical locations, providing flexible, on-demand support that

helps families access trusted information, builds parental confidence and promotes positive outcomes.

- 3.7.16 The digital offer has expanded its programme of virtual delivery in August 2026, including evening sessions, to improve accessibility for families who may be unable to attend support during traditional daytime hours. This flexible approach helps reduce barriers to participation, particularly for working parents and carers, families with mobility difficulties or disabilities, those without access to transport, and families living in rural areas where travel to services may be more challenging. Virtual delivery also enables parents and carers to access support from their own home, supporting increased participation and extending the reach of the Family Hub offer.
- 3.7.17 The digital offer includes a digital engagement tool *Let's Talk Kent About Kent Family Hub* to ensure that the voices of young people, parents, carers and partners help shape Family Hub services. The platform supports co-production and continuous improvement by gathering feedback on services, resources, environments and future developments, helping to ensure that support remains responsive to the needs of families.
- 3.7.18 Several districts introduced monthly Saturday dad groups and father-focused stay-and-play sessions in response to feedback that weekday provision could be difficult to attend. This adapts the timing and identity of the offer around working patterns and creates a space specifically designed for fathers and male carers to attend with their children.
- 3.7.19 These examples show that outreach has adapted the location, timing and method of delivery to increase the reach to as many families in Kent as possible.

3.8 Q8. How is the Council encouraging and increasing engagement with families who would benefit from Family Hub services but are not currently accessing them?

- 3.8.1 Kent's engagement approach is informed by research, parent and carer participation, partner intelligence and analysis of who is and is not using services. The independent 31Ten review, finalised in December 2025, drew on 42 Early Help and Children's Social Work staff, 20 family interviews and a small countywide survey. It found that families were more likely to engage where staff were trusted, support fitted their circumstances, introductions were gradual and information was clear. It also identified barriers including limited awareness of the offer, fear of judgement, language, digital exclusion, working hours and a lack of confidence entering unfamiliar services.
- 3.8.2 Kent has used this evidence to change how the offer is promoted, accessed and shaped. Two Participation and Engagement Officers lead focused work with fathers and male carers and with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Their role is to build relationships, gather intelligence about barriers and work with communities and partners to

adapt communications, referral routes and provision. The wider approach includes a clearer core offer, consistent branding and local communications, digital translation, simpler booking, improved website and directory information, parenting drop-ins, peer and volunteer approaches, and better navigation between Family Hubs, Early Help, health, schools and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations.

- 3.8.3 Parent Carer Panels provide an established route for parents and carers to identify barriers, test communications and influence service design. Over the last three quarters, 411 people engaged with the Panels; 36.36% of participants whose ethnicity was recorded were from groups other than White British. Hybrid and online participation reduces barriers associated with travel, childcare and scheduling. However, Panel members are generally already connected to Family Hubs or related services, so this evidence is considered alongside targeted engagement, community intelligence and independent research to understand the experience of families who are not currently accessing support.
- 3.8.4 Targeted engagement is also used to shape the offer for groups who may be under-represented. Work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities has informed Home Learning Environment packs, culturally sensitive outreach materials, translated information, books reflecting these communities and links with specialist resident and health services. Work with fathers and male carers has informed dedicated website information, antenatal and parenting support, Fathers Matter, Dad's Space and provision outside the standard working week. These developments show how feedback about barriers is translated into changes to the content, presentation and timing of services.
- 3.8.5 Engagement is also strengthened through professional and partnership networks. The Making Connections – Best Start in Life Conference (July 2026) brought together more than 80 professionals, partners and community voices across infant feeding, perinatal mental health and parent–infant relationship services. It improved awareness of professional roles and available support and helped strengthen referral relationships, while the Family Hub Board identified the need to maintain links between Healthy Babies, Family Hubs and Families First.
- 3.8.6 Kent's approach is therefore not limited to promoting existing services. It uses research, participation and partner intelligence to understand why families do not engage and to change communications, referral pathways and service design in response. Available evidence demonstrates purposeful activity and increasing diversity of participation, although further cohort-level data are needed to show whether families who were previously not engaged subsequently access, remain involved with and benefit from Family Hub services.

3.9 Q9. What impact has population growth had on demand for Family Hub services, and how has service provision adapted to respond to any increased demand?

- 3.9.1 Population growth is one factor affecting demand, but changes in the number and complexity of families needing support are also shaped by deprivation, migration, housing development, SEND, health needs and local access barriers.
- 3.9.2 Kent's population increased by approximately 13,700 people, or 0.8%, between 2024 and 2025, compared with growth of 0.6% across the South East and 0.4% across England [ref: kent.gov.uk]. Net migration was the principal driver, with Maidstone and Thanet recording the highest net migration and Dartford the highest natural population increase. These trends do not translate directly into Family Hub demand, but they indicate where local capacity and patterns of need may change.
- 3.9.3 The district-based operating model enables Family Hubs to respond directly to changing need. Staff are deployed across districts rather than being permanently attached to individual buildings, allowing resources to move between hub sites, network locations, community venues, outreach and digital delivery. District plans use community profiles, service activity, partner intelligence and Local Children's Partnership Groups to identify priorities and adjust the location, timing and type of provision. The countywide core offer provides consistency, while local deployment responds to population change, deprivation, rurality, housing growth and emerging demand.
- 3.9.4 This flexible model is particularly important where new housing is not close to an existing Family Hub. Kent's infrastructure planning assesses the effect of development on local service capacity and can seek developer contributions for expansion, equipment, outreach capacity or mobile delivery. Large strategic developments may require an extension or new facility, considered alongside opportunities for co-location.
- 3.9.5 The Council can therefore demonstrate that the operating model is needs-led and capable of adapting to population and housing growth. The current evidence does not yet quantify the direct effect of growth on Family Hub attendance, staffing or outcomes, and this will require district-level demand and capacity data over time.

3.10 Q10. What impact is Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) expected to have on the future delivery, accessibility and sustainability of Family Hub services?

- 3.10.1 Family Hubs remain a national and local strategic priority aligned with Department for Education policy and Kent's Best Start arrangements. The Council continues to deliver the programme and meet current grant and reporting requirements.

3.10.2 Detailed future arrangements under Local Government Reorganisation have not yet been determined and given the government's announcement on 7 September 2026 work has been paused.

3.11 Q11. In relation to the decision to accept the Best Start Family Hub Grant Award, what is now known about the financial and operational implications that were uncertain at the time, particularly where the decision report referred to "delivery expectations not yet known"? Decision - 25/00109 - Best Start Family Hubs Programme - Kent County Council - Council & Democracy

3.11.1 At the point the grant was accepted, the detailed delivery expectations had not been fully specified. These are now substantially clearer. The award supports a three-year programme and requires Kent to maintain a Best Start Local Plan setting out local priorities, planned activity and intended outcomes.

3.11.2 Kent as other recipients of the grant must submit quarterly Department for Education management information returns (covering sites, workforce, service activity, reach, demographic information, parent participation and available outcomes), complete grant returns, programme maturity assessments, Best Start Local Plan updates and annual delivery plans. Kent maintains governance and assurance arrangements so that plans, performance information and statutory returns are reviewed before submission. Kent needs to report on service delivery and outcomes, with evidence of reach, quality and progress against agreed priorities.

3.11.3 The grant mandates Kent to deliver workforce development across relevant Family Hub and partner services and involve parents and carers in service design and review, including through Parent Carer Panels. Additionally, the Council needs to coordinate delivery across Council services, health, commissioned providers and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations.

3.11.4 Financial expectations are also now much clearer than they were at the point of grant acceptance. The Department for Education has confirmed the annual grant profile across the three-year programme, enabling spend to be planned and monitored against agreed workstreams. Kent has established detailed budgets for each workstream and identified the staffing resources required to deliver the programme. Robust financial monitoring arrangements are in place to oversee expenditure, ensure compliance with grant conditions and provide assurance that funding is being used to support delivery of agreed outcomes.

3.11.5 Since the grant was accepted, the Department for Education has also provided significantly more detail about the specific delivery requirements expected of local authorities. These requirements have informed programme design and the allocation of funding across workstreams.

3.11.6 Key delivery expectations now include:

- Delivering evidence-based parenting and home learning environment programmes to improve child development, school readiness and family outcomes.
- Delivering the Healthy Babies Offer, including enhanced infant feeding support, perinatal mental health services and parent-infant relationship interventions for families during pregnancy and the early years.
- Establishing and maintaining a network of Best Start Family Hub sites and wider Network Sites, providing accessible locations for families to access support within their local communities.
- Developing and implementing an outreach strategy to increase awareness, engagement and participation amongst families, particularly those less likely to access services through traditional routes.
- Establishing a Best Start Inclusion Practitioner (BSIP) workforce to strengthen support for children with additional needs, improve early identification of need and enhance pathways between universal, targeted and specialist services.
- Embedding parent and carer participation through Parent Carer Panels and other engagement mechanisms, ensuring that families' lived experiences inform service design, commissioning and continuous improvement.
- Delivering multi-agency workforce development and training across Family Hubs, health services, early years settings and partner organisations to support a consistent and joined-up approach to family support.
- Improving digital access, information sharing and the use of data and insights to help families navigate support, improve service integration and inform continuous service improvement.

3.11.7 These requirements are broader and more detailed than what was known at the time of the original decision and have informed the annual grant profile, expenditure across programme workstreams and the programme management, delivery and support posts funded through the grant.

3.11.8 The operational implications are therefore more extensive than the delivery of individual services. The grant requires programme management, partnership coordination, workforce development, participation, data collection, quality assurance and regular reporting throughout the three-year period. Kent has put these arrangements in place and now has substantially greater clarity about the Department for Education's milestones, assurance requirements and expected outcomes than was available when the decision was taken.

Funded Strand	% of Grant	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29

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 & 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 & Parent Carer Panels	1%	£31,000	£31,000	£31,000
Total		£5,202,600	£5,015,900	£5,135,900

3.11.9 The delivery requirements have also informed the staffing resources required to support the programme. Of the current financial year's total grant to date, £3.3m has been allocated to existing staff costs, which has resulted in a direct saving to Kent County Council.

3.12 Q12. The original proposals noted that Department for Education Best Start funding may be used to support the delivery of existing services. What decisions were subsequently taken regarding the use of this funding, and what impact has this had on service delivery and outcomes? (para 5.3 Executive Decision)

3.12.1 Grant funding has supported delivery of:

- Parenting programmes.
- Home Learning Environment work.
- Infant feeding support.
- Parent Carer Panels.
- Perinatal Mental Health activity.
- Workforce development.
- Data and quality assurance arrangements.
- Partnership and participation functions.

3.12.2 The programme is intended both to enhance existing services and expand delivery in priority areas identified by the Department for Education Best Start framework.

4. Conclusion

4.1 The available evidence indicates that Kent has implemented a broader whole-family model than the former Children's Centre arrangements, extending

support beyond the early years and providing a clearer countywide framework for access, quality and outcomes. The model has strengthened workforce and partnership capacity and introduced more targeted approaches to outreach and inclusion.

4.2 Programme-level measures, the Reducing Parental Conflict evaluation and feedback from children, parents and carers provide encouraging evidence of reach, engagement and practical benefit.

4.3 The evidence on population-level impact, remains under development regarding comparison with the former Children's Centre model, demand for statutory services, consistency between districts, value for money and sustained outcomes for underserved groups. Some of these questions also involve inherent attribution challenges: Family Hubs operate within a wider system, and their contribution cannot always be separated reliably from that of other services or wider social and economic factors. The developing performance framework should strengthen assurance by bringing together activity, quality, demographic reach and outcomes and establishing clearer county, district and cohort trends.

4.4 Members can therefore take assurance that the operating model, governance and improvement infrastructure are in place and that selected interventions are demonstrating positive results. Further assurance will depend on validated trend data, clear baselines, stronger follow-up, financial and value-for-money evidence, and transparent reporting that distinguishes the contribution of Family Hubs from the impact of the wider system.

5. Recommendation

5.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and note the report.