

Scrutiny Call-in Request: 23/00092 - Kent Family Hub Model – Implementation

Proposer: Alister Brady

Seconder: Richard Streatfield

Reasons for call-in:

(a) *Action proportionate to the desired outcome.*

As set out in the Decision Report (bullet point 1.2), 'KCC's proposal is to integrate Children's Centre services, Health Visiting and community-based midwifery care and **youth services** with other key community services into the 0-19 years of age (and up to 25 years of age for young people with special education needs and disabilities [SEND]) countywide service. We have placed emphasis on 'youth services' as this particular element of service provision does not appear to be reflected in the new Family Hub model. All of the expenditure incurred to date has been put towards services for families and those aged under 5: infant feeding; parenting support; home learning environment and perinatal mental health support. While these types of services are welcomed, and will greatly help families and young children, we seem to be forgetting about our young people and their needs. The Family Hub model should be prioritising spend and activity in the area of youth services. 87% of all consultation respondents said that the 'most common Family Hub service likely to be used in the future would be activities for older children and young people' (Decision Report, 3.1.2). We need to offer a full range of services from 0 – age 25, but it does appear that the Family Hub model has been heavily weighted towards Early Years services, and this has come at the expense of youth activities. This is a disproportionate model which does not deliver the 'desired outcome' to provide effective and integrated youth services.

Another agreed 'outcome', stipulated by Government, is that KCC must, in implementing a Family Hub model, deliver 'additionality' – i.e. deliver additional services to those which are currently offered. We are not offering any additional services, particularly in the Youth space. The Cabinet recently decided to stop funding commissioned youth services when the contracts expire next year - a clear reduction in service provision, not an addition. Can the administration and senior officers guarantee that we are offering enough 'additionality' across the Family Hub model and who is accountable for this.

Government have also stressed that Family Hub services must be 'universal'. This is explicitly set out in the [Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme](#) Guide (page 9): *'The **universal** Start for Life offer should include the essential support that any new family might need'*. If services are to be truly 'universal', then provision across the county must be consistent and residents, no matter where they live, their background, their perceived need or lack of need, or their status within Council services currently, everyone should be able to access the services. Unfortunately, however, this will not be the case – or at least not when it comes to services delivered face-to-face. The Decision Report states that 'it will not be possible to have a Family Hub site in all localities, particularly in rural areas with low population density, as outlined within the Kent Communities programme' (bullet point 7.8.2). Residents are effectively left, then, in a 'postcode lottery' situation; the level of service provision (particularly face-to-face services) will depend on where you reside. This is not 'universal' nor equitable. We also find it somewhat puzzling that the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services argued last week at Cabinet that she did not consider maintaining *some* of the commissioned youth service contracts as a possible option, as she felt that this would be unfair on residents and would lead to a 'postcode lottery' predicament. Well, this situation in front of us – in relation to the location of Family Hub sites – is exactly the same. Some residents will enjoy access to sites which are within their immediate vicinity, while others will either have to travel several miles to their nearest site, if they can get there, or will simply have to make do without; as a result, service provision will differ greatly across the county. We therefore do not think we can turn round to

Government and say we are offering a consistent, 'universal' service. What is the legal advice on this matter?

(b) Due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers.

We have already referred to the delivery of in-person / face to face services, and this is a theme which was picked up throughout the public consultation. Overwhelmingly, '90% of all consultees stated that face-to-face was their preferred access route' and that 'they felt comfortable' with this mode of delivery. It would follow that the vast majority of the Family Hub services (indeed, around 90%) should be delivered face-to-face, so as to reflect the wishes of the residents that we serve (this is of course notwithstanding that outreach and digital services work for some people, and that we do need an element of all three delivery methods). It could be argued then that residents' views have not been adequately reflected in the development of the service proposals, and that this could even be viewed as a **predetermined decision**. For 90% of respondents to state that face-to-face services would be their preference is resounding, and so what more could residents have possibly done for Cabinet to have reconsidered their stance on the mode of service delivery? It is detailed that an outreach provision may be offered but there is very little detail on this and how this can be continued once the family hub funding has been spent. There was no desire for a replacement digital offer in-lieu of face to face, however this has also been offered in compensation to residents for the withdrawal of services.

(e) Clarity of aims and desired outcomes.

It is worth noting that 32% of responders stressed that there should be a 'place specifically for teenagers' and that there 'should be activities and support in place' for this cohort (Decision Report, 3.1.4). In response to this, it is stated that 'within every district there will be a space that is accessible and identifiable as a delivery space for young people'. What does this mean in practice? And what will these 'spaces' look like – will they be traditional Youth Hubs, or will they be shared spaces within Children's Centres / Family Hub sites? We and other Members have been asking this question for some time now, but we are yet to receive a detailed and explicit answer, from either the Cabinet Member or the relevant Officers involved. This supposed 'delivery space for young people' needs to be clarified before this decision is implemented, and if it does indeed transpire that these dedicated 'spaces' will be co-located with other Family Hub services, then this will need to be reconsidered. Those who responded to the consultation highlighted that there would need to be a separate place '**specifically for teenagers**'; these young adults will not want to share this space with children and parents, nor would it be practical from them to do so. They need to be in the presence of their peers, in a safe space where they can communicate and interact openly and authentically. The Youth element of the Family Hub model needs to be clarified before this decision is progressed.

The Council is facing incredible financial pressures and this will impact services across the board. As set out in the Decision Report, the Family Hub "transformation project is entirely funded through DfE grant monies, but long-term service delivery will have to be funded through the base budget. Therefore, the model must be sustainable, and this has influenced the model development' (bullet point 10.2). Our concern is that, as budgets become increasingly stretched, we will see less focus on face-to-face services and an even greater reliance on digital and online services (purely because they are cheaper to deliver), and if this is indeed the reality moving forward, then the Council will be ignoring the views and preferences expressed by residents throughout the consultation. Until Members are assured that the Family Hub model is financially sustainable, and that service delivery will not be drastically altered in the future to deliver savings, we do not think this decision should be progressed.

Also, the statutory guidance under Section 507B of the 1996 Education Act states that local authorities must consult, and take into account the views of young people in their area on:

- the suitability of the existing provision
- the need for additional activities and facilities

- access to those activities and facilities
- the redesign of a proposed service

We argue that this statutory duty has not been met, and young people were not involved in the decision making to move to a family hub model. This emergency decision paved the way for these cuts in youth provision in the absence of conforming with the statutory obligations. Given that the subsequent consultation occurred after the decision, we argue that this proves that young people were not listened to which is a direct breach.

(f) The decision is not in line with the Council's Policy Framework

Family Hubs are not in line with the Council's Policy Framework and are not mentioned once in Framing Kent's Future. This is outside of the Council's Policy Framework which is a decision made by full council.

The Administration and Senior Officers have not listened to residents on this, including not involving residents (children and young people and their families) in the previous urgent decision to adopt this model and approach. This is contrary to the principles of openness and transparency. There has been no Member or resident involvement - this is in clear breach of the Council's Policy Framework, as quoted in Framing Kent's Future. There has been no accountability for this failure yet either. Below is a list of the policy framework breaches. As stated above this is the Council's main and overriding policy framework document agreed through a full council decision. The Executive and Senior Officers cannot bypass this.

We need to shift more of our focus to understanding people's needs and the design of services, with greater resident, user, staff and provider engagement so that the full range of options available to meeting need can be properly considered. Page 11.

Commit to funding a diverse infrastructure support offer for the social sector in Kent, which enables organisations to have access to the support they need to thrive, whilst ensuring the sector has a voice to influence and advocate for the people and communities they support. Page 39

Ensure that as we redesign the way we deliver our services and adapt our physical presence in communities, we make these places accessible and inclusive for local community groups and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, offering a space for people to meet or use these assets to deliver activities. Page 39

Create the right conditions to ensure there is a community-based offer of activities for young people that is led by the community and meets the needs of a diverse population. Page 39

Ensure that the voice of social care users and their carers is heard and influences all service design and commissioning decisions. Page 59

Resident engagement: We will ask Kent's residents about their experiences and perceptions of KCC's services to help us understand how we are doing and how we can improve the planning and delivery of services in the future – Page 61

The council's policy framework must align with Government guidance and the council's statutory obligations - It is argued that this decision conflicts with Government guidance and statute. For example, Section 507B of the Education Act 1996 ('Section 507B') <https://www.nya.org.uk/stat-duty/>, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6512d57eb23dad000de70697/Statutory_duty_guidance_for_local_authorities_youth_provision.pdf states that Local Authorities are statutorily responsible 'to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, leisure-time activities and facilities for young people aged 13 to 19 and those with learning difficulties or disabilities aged 20 to 24'. This statutory duty was

recently updated and published in September 2023 which was during the consultation period, therefore this decision does not take these changes into account. The scope of the duty is clear:

Section 507B requires local authorities to, so far as reasonably practicable, secure access for all qualifying young people to a sufficient quantity of 'youth services' namely:

a sufficient quantity of educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being and sufficient facilities for such activities and a sufficient quantity of recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities.

The two forms of activity are not mutually exclusive but local authorities must, so far as reasonably practicable, secure access for young people to sufficient forms of, and facilities for, both types of activities. They include, but are not limited to: sports and informal physical activities, cultural activities, outdoor residential, weekend or holiday-time activities special interest clubs and volunteering activities.

Without clear plans which detail where and how young people can access a sufficient quantity of leisure time activities the council is in clear breach of the Education Act.