

CABINET
– 18 November 2025

Response to Motion by Councillor Creed on Children's Centres
(Ref: 25/214)

Report by Director of Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to

Agree the response to the motion passed at Council on 9 September 2025.

Executive Summary

2. This report aims to provide a summary of the approach and plan to developing Family Hubs in Oxfordshire.
3. This is in response to a motion that was passed at the meeting of the Council on 9 September 2025 that:
 - a. The Cabinet considers how it may support existing community-operated children's centres in Oxfordshire to continue to operate, providing specialist and financial support where possible.
 - b. The Cabinet considers the development of a strategy to increase the range of services offered by existing children's centres in line with Government plans for new Best Start Family Hubs – prioritising those areas of greatest need.
 - c. The Cabinet considers if existing children's centres can help extend the reach of the County's re-established youth service.

National Update on Family Hubs

4. Family Hubs are defined as a place-based way of joining up locally in the planning and delivery of family services. They bring services together to improve access, improve the connections between families, professionals, services, and providers, and put relationships at the heart of family support. Family Hubs offer support to families from conception to those with children of all ages, which is 0-19 or up to 25 for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), with a Start for Life offer at their core.
5. In July, government published the Giving every child the best start in life strategy. This is the government's strategy for improving child development and meeting the ambition that 75% of 5-year-olds in England have a good level of development by 2028. The strategy has three core priorities:

- a. Improving family services, providing high quality support to parents and children from pregnancy to age 5
 - b. More accessible early education and childcare
 - c. Improving the quality of education and care that children receive in early years settings, childminders and reception classes
- 6. As part of the priority in relation to improving family services, the strategy sets out the following areas of focus:
 - a. Development of Best Start Family Hubs, with a new evidenced-informed core offer for parents, a clear local mission around children's early development and a digital parenting offer.
 - b. This will be supported by a new national Best Start digital service - bringing together advice and guidance parents need in one place.

Oxfordshire's Approach to Family Hubs

- 7. Over the last year, the Council has been working with partners to develop and initiate a Family Hub Programme. The initial focus of this programme has been on assessing existing service provision and identifying areas of need. This work will help to inform the identification and placement of Family Hubs across Oxfordshire, ensuring that services are responsive to local requirements.
- 8. The programme has also been focused on developing strategic leadership across the partnership, which has included developing a multi-agency Programme Board. This multi-agency Programme Board, comprising representatives from social care, health, education (including schools), and the voluntary sector, will be responsible for guiding the development, implementation, and evaluation of Family Hubs within the county.

Partnership Working and Existing Community Operated Children's Centres

- 9. A key part of the Family Hub programme will be to collaborate with our Voluntary and Community Sector partners across Oxfordshire, including community-run children's centres, to find the best way to meet the needs of families, babies, children, and young people.
- 10. The Council recognises the value of learning from and utilising the excellent work undertaken by Voluntary and Community Sector partners within the local community.
- 11. At this stage it is too early to provide exact details on the proposed model, however the Council is committed to working with the Voluntary and Community Sector partners, including the community run Children's Centres in designing this network in Oxfordshire.

Family Hubs and Youth Services

12. The programme will ensure that Family Hubs coordinate with Youth Services to ensure that Family Hubs provide services and support for all families with children aged 0-19, and up to 25 for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This will include exploring a range of options, such as how the Council can share community spaces with partners to deliver a range of services.
13. The Family Hubs Programme will ensure that it learns from the Blackbird Leys youth hub already in place, which while it offers a physical space, it is supported and underpinned by a strong local partnership. The Leys Youth Hub connects across several local providers working together to support young people and crosses over various children and young people priority areas. It also endorses the MARMOT place principles and provides a 'one stop shop' for our children.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

14. The Children and Young People's Plan set out a vision of "Every child and young person will have the best possible start in life, the county will be a great place to grow up in, and children and young people will have opportunities to become everything they want to be. These life chances will be reflected equally across our rural and urban communities." As part of the plan, priority areas were identified, including Providing help and support across the system at the earliest opportunity.
15. In Autumn 2024 the Early Help and Prevention Strategy was approved by the Children's Trust Board. The Early Help and Prevention Strategy in Oxfordshire is a comprehensive, multi-agency framework designed to ensure children, young people, and families receive timely and effective support before needs escalate.
16. As well as an Early Help and Prevention Board, an Early Years Strategy was approved by the Children's Trust Board in April 2024. The Early Years Strategy sets out how we will work together across the Early Years system to give all babies and children the start in life they deserve.
17. The Council has partnered with the UCL Institute of Health Equity to become a Marmot Place. This means the Council has committed to tackling health inequalities and improving health fairness in Oxfordshire by working with local partners across the system. These include local authorities, communities, public services, businesses, and voluntary and community sector organisations. The initial areas of focus for the Marmot Programme are to: give every child the best start in life, creating a fair employment and good work for all and ensuring a healthy standard of living for all.

18. For all of the above Family Hubs very much align to these strategies and programmes, and will be key delivering the strategic ambitions of providing earlier help and prevention, improving good level of development and addressing inequalities.
19. As well as Family Hubs, the Council is also delivering on the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme. The aim of this programme is to transform the whole system of help, support and protection, to ensure that every family can access the right help and support when they need it, with a strong emphasis on early intervention to prevent crisis. Family Hubs will be a key part of delivering the Families First Programme, whether through helping to identifying families that may need more intensive multi-agency support, or providing to some families an ongoing, local support network.

Financial Implications

20. Limited funding is being provided to eligible Local Authorities between October and March to prepare for Family Hubs. Oxfordshire has received an allocation of £245k via the Best Start Family Hubs Development Grant for 2025/26. Further funding is expected for a period of three years from April 2026 onwards.
21. At the time of writing, the funding amounts for April 2026 onwards have not been confirmed. However, the Council can expect the funding to be focused on the delivery of evidence-based programmes for parents with children aged 3-4. It can also be utilised to invest in community outreach and opportunities for parents to benefit from peer support, for example investing in stay and play sessions. These activities can support families with children aged 0-5

Comments checked by:

Lewis Gosling, Assistant Finance Business Partner,
Lewis.gosling@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

22. The proposed approach to develop and initiate a Family Hub Programme will contribute to the delivery of a range of statutory duties, including those set out in the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004 and in particular s10 of the Children Act 2004 which states that local authorities have a responsibility to promote inter-agency cooperation to improve the welfare of all children.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Anita.bradley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

23. The multi-agency Programme Board will be required to have oversight of the staffing requirements for the Family Hubs Network.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

24. As part of the development and implementation of Family Hubs, an Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken, and will be overseen and owned by the Multi-Agency Programme Board.

Sustainability Implications

25. As part of the development and implementation of Family Hubs, a Climate Impact Assessment will be undertaken, and will be overseen and owned by the Multi-Agency Programme Board.

Risk Management

26. As part of the Family Hubs Programme, a full risk and issue log has been created and will be monitored through the existing governance structures.

Lisa Lyons
Director of Children's Services

November 2025