



Claire Coutinho MP

Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing

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20 February 2023

The Rt Hon Baroness Morris of Yardley
Chair of the Public Services Committee
Via email

Dear Baroness Morris,

Thank you for the letter from the former Chair (the Rt Hon Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top) dated 26 January 2023. I am passionate about supporting vulnerable children to thrive and I look forward to working with you.

Implementing reviews on children's social care

I am pleased to write to the Committee to inform you that on 2 February 2023 we published [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#) an implementation strategy and consultation, which sets out our plans to transform children's social care. Our strategy will focus on six pillars of action to transform the children's social care system:

- We will provide the right support at the right time, so that children thrive within their families and families stay together through our family help offer.
- We will strengthen our child protection response by getting agencies to work together in a much more integrated way, led by social workers with greater skills and knowledge.
- We will unlock the potential of family networks so that, wherever possible, children who cannot stay with their parents are cared for by people who know and love them already.
- We will reform the care system to make sure we have the right homes for children in the right places and we will be ambitious for children in care and care leavers.
- We will provide a valued, supported and highly-skilled social worker for every child who needs one
- We will make sure the whole system continuously learns and improves and makes better use of evidence and data.

Over the next two years, we will address urgent issues, and lay the foundations for wider-reaching reform across the whole system. Our strategy is backed by £200 million of additional investment, so we can start reforms immediately and build the evidence for future roll-out.

Early intervention and family hubs

Family hubs are a way of joining up locally to improve access to services, the connections between families, professionals, services, and providers, and prioritise strengthening the relationships that carry us all through life. They bring together services for children of all ages, with a great Start for Life offer at their core. At the 2021 Budget, the government announced a package of around £300m to transform services for parents, carers, babies and children in half of upper tier local authorities (LAs) across England.

We agree with the importance of early intervention and preventative services and that family hubs can play an important role in improving access to this support, and developing a stronger connection between local partners, including the voluntary sector.

In our development of the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme, we developed a selection criteria which recognises those areas where there is the highest level of need. Our approach to selecting the LAs eligible to deliver this programme used a metrics-based formula to rank areas, using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index. Details on the selection methodology can be found at the following link: [Family hubs and start for life programme: methodology - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-hubs-and-start-for-life-programme-methodology).

Supporting all local authorities to introduce family hubs and sharing effective practices, beyond the 75 areas

We want to see family hubs open across the country. However, we must focus on delivering well in the areas we are working with, and building the evidence base. We will robustly evaluate the impact of the investment the government has committed to participating local authorities in order to gather best practice and inform future funding decisions.

We have set up the National Centre for Family Hubs (NCFH) to provide expert advice and guidance to all local authorities, local commissioners, academies/schools and third sector bodies with regards to transforming to Family Hubs. The NCFH hosts a comprehensive resource library and implementation toolkit to support family hub providers. This work is supported by disseminating a regular newsletter, a series of learning events, and a community of practice. Examples of the learning events hosted can be found at the following link: [National Centre for Family Hubs \(annafreud.org\)](https://annafreud.org/)

Family hubs are way of delivering existing family support services more effectively. Some local authorities are already operating their own family hubs, without direct government funding, using existing funding streams to move their local service model towards a family hub model. Through the NCFH, we are supporting these areas through sharing good practice and building the evidence base.

Supporting local authorities in response to inflationary pressures

We have made £300m available to LAs for this programme, and are working closely

with LAs to ensure that their proposals secure best value for that investment, including by working with participating LAs to understand the challenges and barriers they are facing, and sharing effective practice.

Timelines for activity

In August 2022, we published [guidance](#) which sets out the expectations of LAs participating on the £300 million Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. This sets out some key milestones, including opening family hubs in the first half of 2023. LAs are now working with the Department for Education and the Department of Health of Social Care to develop ambitious delivery plans. We have also selected 14 trailblazer LAs who will deliver the fastest and most innovative improvements to services and support other LAs with their expertise.

Evaluation of family hubs

Building the evidence base is a key objective of the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme and we are undertaking a comprehensive range of research and analysis to address this. In December 2022, the evaluation innovation fund [published](#) an interim research report, supporting ongoing learning, with the final report expected this year. The evaluation of the [£12 million Family Hubs Transformation Fund](#), exploring what it takes to implement the transition to a family hubs model, is currently underway with bespoke theories of change recently developed for the 10 LAs participating in the evaluation, and an interim report expected later this year. For our summative evaluation of the £300 million Family Hubs and Start for Life programme, we received a number of high-quality bids in December which are now being reviewed. We hope to be able to share further information on the next stages for the project shortly.

We remain committed to supporting every child to thrive and reach their full potential. Our ambitious programmes of reform for children's social care and implementation of family hubs will help to ensure every child will get the support they need.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claire Coutinho', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Claire Coutinho MP
Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing