

REVIEW FINDINGS: The Stronger Families Hub: Our Engagement with Key Stakeholders - Exploring Participation and Feedback to Improve Service and Satisfaction

Committee name	Children, Families and Education Select Committee
Officer reporting	Ryan Dell – Democratic Services
Papers with report	Appendix 1 – Guidance on Policy Reviews Appendix 2 – Updated Scoping Report Appendix 3 – Minutes of previous meetings relating to the review
Ward	All Wards

HEADLINES

Background

As part of the review into the Stronger Families Hub, Members will be advised to start considering findings, conclusions and early draft recommendations on the review for broader discussion and stocktake of the review to-date. These will be with the intention of improving the service of the Stronger Families Hub.

Summary

The Committee has, to date, held five witness sessions. The intention of these sessions was to obtain feedback from a range of stakeholders with a view to improving the service. The first witness session set the scene and outlined the work of the Stronger Families Hub. The second and third heard testimonies from young people and their parents. The fourth discussed the experience of staff of the hub, while the fifth examined partnership working with health representatives. The Committee hopes to run a sixth witness session with education representatives in the near future.

Notwithstanding the final additional witness session, as the bulk of witness testimony is now complete, it is considered timely for Members to start to consider their early collective findings so these can be worked up in more detail, and ultimately incorporated into the final report to Cabinet. Any subsequent findings from the sixth witness session can still be fed into the process.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee consider possible conclusions, findings and early draft recommendations in relation to the review.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

In considering this item, Members should bear in mind the following:

1) Scoping report – looking at the original parameters of the review

The updated review scoping report is attached so Members can be reminded of the original Terms of Reference as set out below, and whether the Committee has met these:

1. to understand the Council's current work with the Stronger Families Hub and what it entails.
2. to scrutinise a service that was launched a year ago and review its effectiveness.
3. to review the Stronger Families Hub's digital process (one number, one address) and how this works in practice.
4. to understand and explore the nature of partnership working.
5. to consider the allocation of information to children and families and access to community support functions.
6. to review the support in place for parents and children that were born during lockdown and the impacts of COVID-19.
7. to acknowledge that all families come in all shapes, sizes and circumstances and how better support can be provided to parents.
8. to explore the measures in place for child protection and safeguarding.
9. subject to the Committee's findings, to make any conclusions, propose actions, service and policy recommendations to the decision-making Cabinet.

2) Policy review guidance

Members will recall the guidance issued in July 2022 on undertaking policy reviews. This guidance is attached to this report for reference again, and Members are asked to take into account Point 4 on Findings and draft recommendations and in particular whether they:

- Meet the initial aims / objectives of the review (as above)
- Be SMART, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
- Not be a short-term fix, but a lasting outcome
- Consider the financial aspect, e.g. cost neutral, provide savings or if at a cost, then affordable – and if possible aligned with the MTFP (budget planning process)
- Are based on a broad evidence base as possible and 'user or resident' insight
- Not create additional bureaucracy, e.g. if it relates to a policy, then to seek to review or amend existing policies (unless there is an absolute imperative for a new policy)
- If publicity or wider engagement or education is recommended, to target such communications as best as possible rather than generally
- Consider 'conclusions' as well as any specific recommendations.

3) Minutes of previous meetings

Attached as Appendix 3 are the minutes of previous meetings relating to the review, which may assist in Members' considerations.

4) Possible areas for emerging recommendations

In discussion with the Chairman, Members may wish to consider the following 'areas' to develop and refine possible findings, conclusions and draft recommendations:

1. Promotion of the Stronger Families Hub
2. How we can increase awareness of the service
3. How we can provide a more detailed outline of what the process involves
4. The capacity / efficiency of the MASH team
5. Joint working with other Local Authorities.
6. Emergency bed accommodation
7. Asylum-Seeking Health support
8. Children's integrated therapy and focus on Autism Spectrum Disorder.
9. Further integration between children's services and adult services.

Committee Members may also wish to bring their own findings and thoughts based upon the various witness testimony received.

Democratic Services will then "road-test" any draft recommendations from the Committee, looking at their feasibility with the relevant service area and report back to the Committee to a subsequent meeting, in preparation for shaping the final draft report for the Committee's approval.

RESIDENT BENEFIT

The aim of the review into the Stronger Families Hub is to hear testimonies from stakeholders as to how the service can be improved, in addition to what is currently working well.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.

Appendix 1 - Guidance on undertaking policy reviews

Over the years, Hillingdon's overview and scrutiny committees have undertaken successful in-depth reviews of Council services and policies. This has resulted in a number of positive changes locally, with some also affecting policy at a national level. Such committees engage Councillors in a wide range of Council activity and build a greater understanding about service provision to residents.

Policy reviews generally seek to:

1. Address a [significant] matter affecting the Borough
2. Seek to improve the delivery and/or efficiency of local services
3. Consider changes to policies or procedures to improve outcomes to residents/users

REVIEW PHASES

The typical phases of a review are as follows and set out further below:

- 1 Selection of topic
- 2 Scoping the review / setting out objectives
- 3 Witness & evidence stage (this is the main activity)
- 4 Findings and Draft recommendations (possible early report draft)
- 5 Final report approved by Committee
- 6 Referred to Cabinet for consideration
- 7 Monitoring the implementation of recommendations once approved / amended by Cabinet at meetings, i.e. in six months

1. Selection of topic

It is always best to sound out and check the feasibility of potential review topics early on, as there will be lots of ideas coming forward and often knowing what topic will add most value will be difficult to gauge at this stage. It is important not to generalise, e.g. a review into waste services.

It may also not be known whether a topic is currently under review by the Cabinet or Council officers or part of a planned service transformation in due course. All of this and other factors need to be investigated and in particular, any duplication of review activity should not take place.

Whilst most policy reviews last a number of months, not all policy review ideas will suit this and may benefit from a single meeting review. It really depends on the scope of the review. It very narrow, i.e. a particular service policy, then a single meeting review may suffice. If a review seeks to look at an entire way a service operates then a number of months may be required to ensure you can undertake all your witness sessions and secure the necessary evidence and information before you formulate your findings.

Ideas for review topics can come from a number of sources including:

- Committee Members
- Cabinet Members.
- Council officers
- External partners / organisations
- Residents
- Ombudsman findings

When Councillors or the Committee itself considers a potential review topic, it is recommended running it through the Scrutiny Topic Scorecard (see Annex A). This gives you the opportunity to 'score' topics based upon their impacts under the following criteria:

Resident focused	Influence	Achievable
Correct remit	New	Wider support
Drives improvement	Drives transformation and efficiency	National impact

Another way to consider a potential review topic, is to add this as an information item at an upcoming meeting on your work programme, to probe the matter further with Council officers and ascertain whether it merits a fuller review – again perhaps running it through the Scorecard above.

It is strongly advised that one review topic is undertaken at any one time, given resources.

2. Scoping report

Once a topic is agreed upon by the Committee, then officers will prepare a scoping report setting out the objectives of the review for your consideration. The scoping report will show how the review can be timetabled and structured, i.e. through themed witness sessions, along with details of potential witnesses and other contextual information to get the review started, e.g. lines of enquiry or questioning of witnesses.

The scoping report is a 'live' document owned by the Committee. Should the review's focus change mid-review, then the scoping document and its objectives can be adapted.

3. Witness and evidence stage

Ultimately, the Committee's efforts are at their best when external witnesses and residents participate, adding value to intelligence gathering and findings. In support of this, Committees have undertaken a variety of both formal and informal activity "in meetings" and "outside meetings". It is important to pull together a broad evidence based for any potential findings later on. Additionally, the ability for Councillors to bring their 'local' insight is highly valuable. Activities the Committee can undertake include:

- Surveys / social media
 - Promotion of review to seek views
 - Invite the relevant Cabinet Member to attend for their views
 - Question key council officers
 - Hold informal workshops
 - Networking events, e.g. with partners
 - Have closed meetings, i.e. confidential, such as social care clients
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- Commission reports from council officers / externally
- Request data and intelligence on the topic
- Visits to other local authorities
- Undertake site visits within the Borough or council facilities
- Appoint experts or advisors to join the Committee throughout its review
- Selecting the best range of witnesses to get a real user / resident perspectives
- Invite national experts in their field

Whilst information will be provided to Councillors, it may be helpful when preparing for this stage of a review, that Councillors:

- Prepare their draft questions for each witness in advance;
- Read a witness bio or find out more about their organisation;
- Do their own additional research on the topic - you may find something officers don't!
- Use their network of councillors in other local authorities to seek views;
- Tell residents at Surgeries / Ward Walks about your review, get their thoughts.

4. Findings and draft recommendations & 5. Final Report

After hearing from witnesses and receiving evidence, the Committee then will meet to pull together all the information and shape its collective findings, i.e. what needs to be improved or changed as a result.

The Committee will form 'draft' recommendations from this, which consistent with the Protocol on Cabinet and Scrutiny Relations, are usually shared with the Cabinet Member for their feedback and valuable insight.

In developing any recommendation, the Committee should bear in mind the following:

- Meet the initial aims / objectives of the review
- Be SMART, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
- Not be a short-term fix, but a lasting outcome
- Consider the financial aspect, e.g. cost neutral, provide savings or if at a cost, then affordable – and if possible aligned with the MTFP (budget planning process)
- Be based on a broad evidence base as possible and 'user or resident' insight
- Not create additional bureaucracy, e.g. if it relates to a policy, then to seek to review or amend existing policies (unless there is an absolute imperative for a new policy)
- If publicity or wider engagement or education is recommended, to target such communications as best as possible rather than generally
- Consider 'conclusions' as well as any specific recommendations.

Around this time, the Democratic Services Officer supporting the Committee will advise further on findings and drafting recommendations. Throughout this process, their role is critical to the Committee, to guide Members and secure the information and any witness activity that Members wish to undertake. They also work with the Chairman to bring the final draft report for the Committee to approve before it is scheduled to Cabinet.

6. Referred to Cabinet & 7. Monitoring of recommendations

The Committee's report will be shared with the Leader and Cabinet Member and scheduled to a Cabinet meeting as soon as possible. There is a legal requirement for any such report to be considered by the Cabinet.

Should Cabinet approve the Committee's recommendations, then they become official policy and officers are charged with implementing them.

A post report review is undertaken in say 6 months or a years' time to see how the Committee's recommendations have been implemented. This is scheduled on your work programme.



Annex A – Scrutiny Topic Scorecard 2022-2026

<i>Criteria scores showing 1-5 (5 being the highest, 0 the lowest). Then add up the total score. The higher the better review.</i>										
Topic	Resident focused	Correct remit	Influence	New	Achievable	Wider support	Drives improvement	Delivers transformation and efficiency	National impact	Score

See criteria descriptions overleaf...

Detailed criteria to assess review scoring <i>(5 being the highest, 0 the lowest)</i>
Resident-focused – The topic will have high impact on residents and the community, with public interest and scope for making a positive difference (can be universal or a targeted group of people or an area of the Borough e.g. young people or a particular town centre)
Correct remit – A topic that is clearly covered in the Committee’s Terms of Reference and does it cut clearly into the domain of other Committees (unless a cross-cutting brief). If it does, then see if you can narrow the focus of the topic.
Influence - A topic that relates to a service, event or issue in which the Council is in control of, has a significant stake in or influence over the matter, e.g. with partners.
New - A new, fresh topic preferably. One which has not previously been reviewed by a Committee in the last 2-3 years, or which is not currently being reviewed by another Committee or internally by Cabinet Members and Officers, e.g. through service transformation.
Achievable – A topic that is not open ended. One where the Committee’s work programme can accommodate the review. Where there is likely to be a good level of expertise and information to draw on to complete. Does the topic need to be narrowed to make it more achievable?
Wider support - A topic that is likely to receive buy-in from the Committee and wider Council, e.g. Cabinet Members, Officers. Or support is welcome from partner organisations to review the matter.
Drives improvement - A topic where performance levels of a service have dropped on a consistent basis, or the contractor is not performing against agreed standards or there are significance (evidenced) complaints or feedback from residents on the matter.
Delivers transformation and efficiency – a topic in support of the Council budgetary objectives, any areas where service re-modelling is under consideration in the <u>medium to longer-term</u> , that with Members’ insight can help to deliver future savings, efficiencies and value for money services to residents. A topic where new ways of working could be adopted to benefit service delivery.
National impact – A topic where emerging or recent legislation mean that it would be timely to review the matter to ensure Hillingdon Council is well prepared. Or a topic, that whilst Hillingdon focussed, could potentially be of benefit to other local councils or governmental authorities.



Children, Families and Education Select Committee Review Scoping Report - 2022/23

Draft title: The Stronger Families Hub: Our Engagement with Key Stakeholders – Exploring Participation and Feedback to Improve Service and Satisfaction

1. OBJECTIVES

Aim of review

At its meeting on 20 July 2022, the Children, Families and Education Select Committee agreed as its major review to investigate how the Stronger Families Hub was functioning in practice since it was launched in August 2021. This document serves as an introduction to the topic of the Stronger Families Hub and sets out in general terms the context to the Stronger Families Hub within local government, the objectives, the challenges and offers a framework for any subsequent review.

For the purposes of the review, it is significant to distinguish between the Stronger Families initiative and Stronger Families Hub. Both these areas are distinct in their roles although when developed and rolled out the Stronger Family Hubs will strengthen the early and targeted intervention available for families in the Borough. This review will specifically focus on the service in place for children and young people.

It is intended that the review will support the work of Children's Services in helping to shape its ways of working, identifying areas of weakness and how overall engagement with key stakeholders can be improved.

Terms of Reference

The following Terms of Reference are suggested for the review, subject to any changes agreed by the Committee:

1. to understand the Council's current work with the Stronger Families Hub and what it entails.

2. to scrutinise a service that was launched a year ago and review its effectiveness.
3. to review the Stronger Families Hub's digital process (one number, one address) and how this works in practice.
4. to understand and explore the nature of partnership working.
5. to consider the allocation of information to children and families and access to community support functions.
6. to review the support in place for parents and children that were born during lockdown and the impacts of COVID-19.
7. to acknowledge that all families come in all shapes, sizes and circumstances and how better support can be provided to parents.
8. to explore the measures in place for child protection and safeguarding.
9. subject to the Committee's findings, to make any conclusions, propose actions, service and policy recommendations to the decision-making Cabinet.

2. BACKGROUND

Stronger Families Hub Team

The Team was initially set up with two team managers, an advanced practitioner, 11 full-time and one part-time social worker (typically senior social workers) as well as 10 triage officers. In light of the increased demand since the launch, interim arrangements have been made for additional staffing subject to the findings of the project review.

Context and key information

“Our vision is to empower families to be and feel strong, safe and healthy through the provision of early and targeted support to reach their full potential.

To achieve our vision, we need to respond to need when it arises and work together to ensure we have the right person for the child and family leading the right intervention.”

The Stronger Families Hub programme is a 24/7 service available to residents providing a wide range of support services. It can be described as a locality based Early Help and Prevention Service supporting children at the earliest stage by working closely with partners across Hillingdon.

The Stronger Families Hub programme went live on 03 August 2021 and provides a single point of contact for all safeguarding referrals and an online route to refer a child to social care. The areas of support include:

- Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)
- Adolescent Development Services
- Portage
- Stronger Families (Locality Key working teams)
- Social Care
- Attendance issues
- Children Missing from Education

The Council's website includes further information regarding the service model which combines a social work led service, adult mental health service and the Hillingdon MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub). It enables schools, post-16 and early years providers to request support in

an educational establishment for children with SEND. It enables health professionals to conform with the statutory requirement of completing a SEND Early Health Notification, once they have identified a child who may have long-term SEND. The Stronger Families Hub allows better information sharing between professionals, which ensures a more co-ordinated and faster response to the needs of children and families in Hillingdon.

Relevant Legislation

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 2004
- The Children and Social Work Act 2017

External issues and risks to Stronger Families Hub

Stronger Families Hub within local government is faced with a number of challenges, including:

- Increasing demand for services combined with decreasing funding/ resources
- Continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing recovery; and
- Recent implications from BREXIT, including scarcity of materials, manpower and expertise

Current data, best practice and research

Further data and research will be identified as the review progresses.

Connected work

The Stronger Families Hub in Hillingdon has the potential to impact all children and social care services within the Council. Implications to this impact will be identified as the review progresses.

Executive Responsibilities

The Cabinet Member responsible is Councillor Susan O'Brien, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education.

3. EVIDENCE & ENQUIRY

Lines of Enquiry

Lines of enquiry can be expanded as the review progresses or included in relevant witness session reports. However, lines of enquiry may include:

- establishing the historical background of the Stronger Families Hub to compare how well the service is being delivered now.
- real focus on the end user and how they have found the service in practice.
- exploring what support functions are in place and whether these can be improved.
- the nature of partnership working and how it is combined in practice.

Potential witnesses

Witnesses will be identified by the Committee in consultation with relevant officers.

Surveys, site-visits or other fact-finding events

Such opportunities will be identified as the review progresses. A possible survey of suppliers will be considered to provide useful feedback and evidence for the Committee.

Future information that may be required

Further information may be identified as the review progresses.

4. REVIEW PLANNING & TIMETABLE

Proposed timeframe & milestones for the review:

Meeting Date	Action	Purpose/ theme	Witnesses/ officers attending
03 November 2022	Agree Scoping Report	Information and analysis	Democratic Services/ Select Committee
06 December 2022	Witness Session 1	Setting the scene	Antony Madden, Head of First Response & Out of Hours
18 January 2023 – 10 am	Witness Session 2	The voice of parents	Meeting with parents
18 January 2023 – 5pm	Witness Session 3	The voice of young people	Meeting with young people
06 February 2023 – 1pm in CR 4	Witness Session 4	The voice of providers	<u>Staff:</u> Grace Mackenzie – Triage Officer Priyanka Yadav – Interim MASH Manager Shreena Patel – Social Worker Ritu Gupta – Out of Hours Team Manager Patsy Martin – Key Worker Lea Perez – Key Worker Team Manager
14 March 2023 – 7pm in CR5	Witness Session 5	Partnership working – health representatives	Anthony Madden – Head of Service, First Response, MASH and Out of Hours Social Work Siobhan Appleton – Assistant Director for Safeguarding Adults, Safeguarding Children and Children Looked After Emma Kay – Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children (Hillingdon)/ CNWL Interim Head of Safeguarding Children Sian Thomas – Head of Children's Services, Hillingdon
18 April 2023	Committee session	De-brief and emerging findings	To discuss key findings and identify potential recommendations

TBC	Witness Session 6	Partnership working – education representatives	
TBC	Approval of draft final report	Proposals – agree recommendations and final draft report to Cabinet	

Resource requirements

None.

Equalities impact

None.

Background Papers/ further reading

[Stronger Families - Hillingdon Council](#)

[MASH - Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Partnership Arrangements \(Hillingdon LSCB\) \(hillingdonsafeguardingpartnership.org.uk\)](#)

[Early Help: Stronger Families - Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Partnership Arrangements \(Hillingdon LSCB\) \(hillingdonsafeguardingpartnership.org.uk\)](#)

Appendices

App A - Stronger-Families-Flyer

App B - Stronger-Families-Webinar-Slides

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

3 November 2022

Meeting held at Committee Room 6 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



35. **SCOPING REPORT FOR PROPOSED REVIEW 'THE STRONGER FAMILIES HUB: OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS - EXPLORING PARTICIPATION AND FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE SERVICE AND SATISFACTION'** (*Agenda Item 7*)

The Committee considered the scoping report for the proposed review on 'The Stronger Families Hub: Our engagement with key stakeholders – exploring participation and feedback to improve service and satisfaction.'

Members were keen to hear from a wider range of stakeholders including young people, parents and headteachers. It was agreed that the scoping report would be updated to reflect this and the first witness session would take place on 6 December 2022.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and considered the scoping report to initiate the review.

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

6 December 2022

Meeting held at Committee Room 6 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



44. **THE STRONGER FAMILIES HUB: OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS - EXPLORING PARTICIPATION AND FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE SERVICE AND SATISFACTION - WITNESS SESSION 1** (*Agenda Item 5*)

The Head of Service for First Response, MASH and out of hours social work - Children & Young People Services introduced the report on The Stronger Families Hub: Our engagement with key stakeholders – exploring participation and feedback to improve service and satisfaction – Witness Session One. A detailed overview of the report was provided and key aspects of the report were highlighted.

The Stronger Families Hub

The Stronger Families Hub was launched in August 2021. The Committee heard that the service provided a single point of contact for children, young people and families in Hillingdon to access a wide range of support services 24/7 and aimed to offer the right help at the right time.

Members were informed that experience gained through the Covid 19 pandemic informed the ways of working and helped shaped a delivery model to meet the demand for out of hours support. The new model aimed to:

- Focus on 'prevention' from the very first point of contact.
- Transition from 'Emergency Duty' to 24/7 Support
- Deliver a robust Early Help Offer
- Reduce the demand on statutory services

It was noted that operating under a clearly defined pathway had helped ensure all advice and support to children and families was targeted, consistent, and the use of pre statutory resources was maximised. The Stronger Families Hub changed the 'front door' approach, as well as the capacity and capability to deliver strong preventative services via an Early Help Assessment and Team around the family approach. Redirected resources embedded the Key Working Service across three localities offering a rich skill set by integrating the workforce. Members were informed that the service had supported and strengthened each locality to encourage lead professionals to confidently manage Stronger Families Plans where appropriate and build community resilience.

A review of the Stronger Families model was undertaken 12 months of operation. The findings of the reviews were outlined to the Committee.

In order to ensure that the service remained dynamic and responsive to children's changing needs, it was reported that a number of initiatives were taking place including

a review of the All Age Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, MASH and Stronger Families Hub establishment.

Performance data

The Committee received detailed performance data throughout the report and presentation. Headline performance data highlighted included:

Contacts in the last 6 months	11,541
Early Help Assessments completed	816
Referrals in the last 6 months	2,074
Statutory assessments completed in the last 6 months	2083

Service user feedback

The Committee was presented with feedback from service users. Since the Stronger Families Hub was launched it had been well received and utilised.

Appendices

The Committee had regard to a number of appendices including:

- A blank Early Help Assessment form.
- A completed Early Help Assessment form that had been completed and referred to the Stronger Families Hub.
- An example of a Stronger Families Plan that detailed information such as child contact details, summary of review discussion and plan going forward.
- Terms of Reference for the Stronger Families multi agency review.
- Feedback from parents on the intervention from Stronger Families.
- Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) data report for October 2022 that included in-depth information such as contacts in the last six month, early help placements and demographics of children across all areas of children's social care.

Committee discussion

The Committee noted the information presented and sought additional information on a few points.

Regarding the Stronger Families Champion in schools, it was explained that this initiative was a response to a recommendation from a subgroup and helped support joint working and contributions to Early Help Assessments and Stronger Families Plans. Discussions with colleagues in schools were being planned to promote the initiative further. In terms of working with the third sector and voluntary organisations, the Committee heard that there were already good working relationships in place with organisations such as Brilliant Parents and feedback was often used to consider how services could be improved.

On the matter of out of hours lines and how serious cases were managed, it was noted that the Stronger Families Hub was a single point of access for professionals and families and included a 24/7 Triage Service that replaced the previous out of hours model (known as the Emergency Duty Team). To support Early Help Key Working services were realigned to create three locality based Stronger Families Key Working Teams and; new

pathways were implemented to help ensure that preventative intervention was fully utilised and statutory social work was retained for children with complex needs and children at risk. There was regular training available depending on which agencies were involved and all partners attended induction days for additional training. The duty to refer was always emphasised.

The Committee heard that going forward there would no longer be the requirement for the commissioned service Anchor to handle social care calls out of hours thus reducing the need for handovers and streamlining this service further. Cases were coordinated by triage and allocated to teams depending on the nature of the call and specialism. The demands of out of hours social work had changed significantly and detailed analysis had been undertaken of the nature of out of hours work in order to reshape the service. Data collated demonstrated that childrens contact outweighed adults at a ratio of 27% adults to 73% CYPS and although the adults ratio was lower, the nature of work was more complex.

Members welcomed the positive feedback from parents and were informed that when there were any complaints officers worked to resolve the issues quickly. It was also noted that as part of the review's witness programme Members would have an opportunity to meet with parents and young people and would be able to explore any suggestions for improvements/complaints then.

Officers were thanked for their work in this area which was clear throughout the report and data provided. Given that there had already been reviews undertaken in April and October 2022, it was questioned what was hoped by the Committee's review. It was explained that the Stronger Families Hub had increased in size since its introduction and there had been large investment in this area. Members were requested to provide scrutiny on the area to consider how the service could be improved, strengthened and whether it was delivering value for money. It was also acknowledged that Councillors engaged first hand in the community, and it was hoped that the review would encourage a positive outlook of the Stronger Families Hub and help breakdown any negative stereotypes. There was now a strong focus on Early Help and safeguarding and the review would raise further awareness of the initiative.

During Member questions it was noted that existing data came from a variety of different sources that was cross referenced.

In terms of how the Stronger Families Hub engaged with children where English was not the first language, it was reported that having a diverse work force helped to develop relationships with service users. There was always the opportunity to use interpreters to ensure that comprehensive assessments took place.

The Committee was aware that sometimes there appeared to be a stigma attached to asking for help. It was confirmed that the Stronger Families Hub was promoted through the safeguarding partnership, council website and communications issued from the Corporate Communications team. There was also work being done within religious settings and schools to increase education and consultation including with young people. An example of this was the DfE Build Back Better Fund initiative in regards to safeguarding woman and children from harmful practices including Female Genital Mutilation. The initiative was based in the Stronger Families Hub and included 4 consultation events with residents.

During Member discussions, it was noted that police referrals often related to domestic violence and neglect. It was highlighted that the Stronger Families Hub was a one point

contact to encourage and simplify the Early Help route. To avoid discouraging people to complete forms the Committee was informed that the forms were made created in a user-friendly way and avoided any technical jargon. Having the single point of contact made the process more efficient as it avoided going back and forth and enabled accurate assessments to be made.

The Committee thanked officers for their work in this area and the detailed report and presentation.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the and commented on the progress made by the Stronger Families initiative at this time and asked questions as part of its review.

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

02 February 2023

Meeting held at Committee Room 6 – Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW

64.	<p>SCOPING REPORT FOR PROPOSED REVIEW ‘THE STRONGER FAMILIES HUB: OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS – EXPLORING PARTICIPATION AND FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE SERVICES AND SATISFACTION (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>It was noted that there were two upcoming witness sessions, witness session four: the voice of providers, and witness session five: partnership working. Regarding witness session five, it was noted that work to invite representatives from schools was ongoing. Members raised having witness sessions in the evening and it was noted that the witness sessions with young people and parents (witness sessions two and three) needed to take place outside of the recorded Committee meeting for reasons of safeguarding. However, it was noted It was noted that witness session four was open to all Members, and that witness session five would take place during the next Committee meeting on 14 March.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the updated scoping report.</p>
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Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

14 March 2023

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 – Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW

72.	<p>WITNESS SESSION 5 – PARTNERSHIP WORKING (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>The Committee held its fifth witness session into its review of the Stronger Families Hub. This session focused on partnership working with health representatives. Witnesses in attendance were the Head of Service, First Response, MASH and Out of Hours Social Work; the Assistant Director for Safeguarding Adults, Safeguarding Children and Children Looked After; the Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children (Hillingdon)/ CNWL Interim Head of Safeguarding Children), and the Head of Children’s Services for Hillingdon.</p> <p>The Head of Service, First Response, MASH and Out of Hours Social Work introduced himself and his role with the Stronger Families Hub. It was noted that this session related to partnership working with health representatives and that a future session would be held with education representatives. The partners worked with families who were under pressure, and also dealt with impacts of COVID-19 and the cost of living. Despite the challenges, the partners remained committed to providing support, and there was close collaboration between health partners and the Stronger Families Hub. The main source of referrals had come via the Police, with up to 11 officers on site within the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH*) to enable the quick exchange of information. The second most referrals had come via health partners.</p> <p><i>(*MASH was the Stronger Families Hub's safeguarding element where professionals shared information quickly about police referrals of domestic abuse (Merlins) and referrals where there were concerns about a child's safety or welfare.)</i></p> <p>The Head of Children’s Services, CNWL, noted that their portfolio included children aged 0-19, health visiting, school nursing, child development centres, community paediatricians, children integrated therapy, occupational therapy, paediatric occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech and language, children’s community nursing team and working with those with life-limiting conditions. Health representatives were a large partner of the Stronger Families Hub. The above noted services had been asked about their experiences with the Stronger Families Hub prior to this witness session, and the feedback was positive, despite some teething problems. Partners highlighted the benefit of the Stronger Families Hub as one forum for a range of issues, and this was linked to the early identification of needs. It was also noted that partners had a strong relationship with the Local Authority.</p> <p>The Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children (Hillingdon)/ CNWL Interim Head of Safeguarding Children noted that they worked with all children’s services when they had safeguarding concerns and delivered training to staff. They line managed the MASH Health Practitioner within Hillingdon. There was</p>
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lots of interaction with MASH and these services used the Stronger Families Hub a lot. The Named Nurse further noted the initial teething problems but that they were pleased with the work of the Stronger Families Hub.

The Assistant Director for Safeguarding Adults, Safeguarding Children and Children Looked After at CNWL NHS North West London worked in close collaboration with all health services including Primary Care, Primary Medical Care, Acute Trusts and Community Trusts. Part of their role was to ensure that health colleagues were discharging their safeguarding responsibilities appropriately. The Stronger Families Hub came under this remit. They noted that there had been issues for the Acute Trust with the online portal when initially launched but commended the Local Authority for its response to this. A sub-group has been established which had discussions around the initial operational issues with the online portal, which had helped to resolve some of these issues and to reduce anxieties. It was noted that there was still some work to do with Primary Medical Care via support for GPs in terms of accessing and using the portal. A positive aspect was the useful guidance document that had come out alongside the launch of the portal. This had been well received by Primary Care.

Members questioned how feedback was received from or on behalf of non-verbal children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). Witnesses noted that training was ongoing with key workers as well as social workers which included training on communication tools, such as parent-child observations for non-verbal children. Continuous improvement was reviewed on a four-weekly basis through one-to-one supervision, while there was also peer supervision and group supervision. There were also workshops taking place with partners. There was a reliance on universal services for information sharing, but once information was shared, the process was more streamlined than it was prior to the establishment of the Stronger Families Hub due to its one number, one email, one online portal that children, parents, carers and professionals can access.

Partners further noted that training was assertive in knowing that children with SEND were at higher risk of safeguarding concerns. This was linked to the Early Health notification.

Members questioned how feedback was received from young people after any case of safeguarding breach. Partners noted that there was a focus on getting better at obtaining feedback and that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) asked for evidence of this feedback. Reference was made to the Teddy Bear's picnic but it was noted that improvements were needed and so partners gave a partial assurance to the Committee on partners getting feedback from young people.

Members further highlighted other voluntary groups such as scouts and girl-guides, and sports teams as avenues for feedback or for direction to the Stronger Families Hub. Partners further noted Young Health Watch, the Children in Care Council, and the Child's Voice Panel as other avenues for feedback. Feedback was also received during the statutory SEND process. It was, however, noted that sometimes feedback was sought from the easier-to-reach groups as opposed to all groups. A possible future group for children with epilepsy was referenced as a potential new route for engagement as part of the plan for 2023.

Partners noted that for children with disabilities, when a referral was made, partners had close relationships to identify which professionals know that individual child well, for example a Speech Therapist or Occupational Therapist, who could identify their communication needs and identify which tools to use to get the child's voice heard.

Reference was made to Speech and Language therapists within the Youth Offending Service – these were key in the communication process and were often linked to undiagnosed cases of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Members asked about the challenges faced and what areas of improvement could be identified. Partners noted that quality assurance of referrals being made was one area to look at, as well as mental health services. On quality assurance, partners further noted that this was tracked, and there was practitioner-to-practitioner tracking where possible. This had led to less escalation to managers. Partners noted other partner organisations such as Border Force and noted an increase in quality in Early Help Assessments. Partners noted that the form on the online portal had been amended to be more concise, and now consisted of drop-down boxes. Further noted was the importance of ensuring that staff were supported in quality assurance.

Members referred to the next agenda item and asked if there was a capacity issue. Partners noted that some staff were on lean contracts and there were some vacancy issues around Paediatric Occupational Therapy, although this reflected a national issue. It was acknowledged that funds were tight but that an Asylum-Seeking Health Visitor would be beneficial as well as a Paediatric Occupational Therapist. It was noted that there was a struggle with the increase in the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and that the number of referrals to the Child Development Centre for concerns regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were increasing. Creative and innovative ideas were often pursued as a way around capacity issues.

Members commended the more joined-up nature of the service with partners, and asked about any issues with data sharing between agencies and how these were overcome. Partners noted that GDPR should not be a barrier to keeping children safe. It was noted that the Stronger Families Hub was a consent-based service, and it was recommended through a review that parents and carers be better informed that consent meant to more than one agency. This was known as universal consent.

There was also a named nurse for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), who was trained in information-sharing. Data was provided through the Safeguarding Children Partnership for CAMHS. It was noted here that a CAMHS post within MASH would be beneficial.

Members asked the partners about their work with other Local Authorities and how this differed from its work with Hillingdon. Partners noted that most of their work was with Hillingdon and that the service being 24-hours was impressive, as not having to use emergency teams outside of core hours kept the quality of service high. Also, having the one front door was beneficial. Partners noted that there was not enough experience of other Boroughs to give an accurate comparison. Partners again referenced the earlier point

about quality assurance as an area for improvement. It was noted that the voice of the child runs through all sub-groups, and this was something that Hillingdon did well.

Members asked about the percentage of children with additional needs being identified through ASQ checks, how many were missed, and where any were missed, what was done to bridge this gap, in particular between children with and without SEND. It was noted here that further information could be shared outside of the meeting.

Partners noted the importance of early identification, and that they worked with a designated officer for SEND. The multi-agency approach of the EHCP was noted, and there was good signposting to, for example, resources available in alternative languages. Partners noted that the multi-agency work around SEND was strong.

Members asked partners for their input into possible recommendations for the major review. Partners noted that there were concerns around new arrivals in hotels, and so an Asylum-Seeking Health Visitor would be beneficial in terms of early identification of needs. Partners also had concerns over the number of vacancies within their services. Investment into children's integrated therapy services was recommended, as was more focus on children with ASD. ASD navigators or pathways was suggested as a new approach to ASD. Stronger integration was needed between children's services and adult services, as well as the transition when young people move from children's services to adult services. The new Transition nurse was highlighted as a recent benefit. More focus on mental health provision and on neurodiversity support was recommended.

Members sought clarification on, and partners confirmed that, communication within the partners' services was good, but communication with other agencies was what required improvement. It was further noted here that quality assurance was a high priority for the Stronger Families Hub sub-group.

RESOLVED: That the Committee asked questions of the witnesses and noted the updated scoping report.