

# REVIEW BY THE CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE: *THE STRONGER FAMILIES HUB: OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS - EXPLORING PARTICIPATION AND FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE SERVICE AND SATISFACTION*

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<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education
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<b>Papers with report</b>	<b><u>Final review report circulated on separate appendix</u></b>

## HEADLINES

<b>Summary</b>	To receive the final report detailing the major review conducted by the Children, Families and Education Select Committee which considered the Stronger Families Hub. The review makes recommendations for Cabinet to consider.
<b>Putting our Residents First</b>  <b>Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026</b>	This report supports our ambition for residents/ the Council of: An efficient, well-run, digital-enabled council working with partners to deliver services to improve the lives of all our residents  This report supports our commitments to residents of: Safe and Strong Communities
<b>Financial Cost</b>	There are no direct financial costs arising from the initial recommendations with potential future investment subject to development of an appropriate business case and funding strategy.
<b>Relevant Select Committee</b>	Children, Families and Education Select Committee.
<b>Relevant Wards</b>	All.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet welcomes the Select Committee's findings, it's report and approves their recommendations which seek to enhance the Stronger Families Hub to residents:

## **SELECT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1) To continue to raise the profile of the Stronger Families Hub with all Hillingdon stakeholders, including schools (both in and out of the Borough), community organisations, third sector organisations and elected Members, with a view to improving resident awareness of the Hub and the support available to them;**
- 2) Seeks to maintain the resilience of the 24/7 Hub model by monitoring the staff and triage resourcing covering the out-of-hours service, in light of comments made by witnesses;**
- 3) Review the capacity within the Hub to support increased demand, in light of comments made by witnesses, in particular from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving at Heathrow Airport;**
- 4) To note the Health and Social Care Select Committee's review into the effectiveness of the CAMHS referral pathway, and to review ways to enhance signposting around mental health services via the Hub and to voluntary and private sector services;**
- 5) To continue to raise awareness of the Stronger Families Hub regularly with partners to keep abreast of changes or new developments. This is to include an annual renewal of the membership of the Stronger Families sub-group to ensure it reflects all stakeholders;**
- 6) Ensure the Stronger Families Hub is accessible to a diverse range of communities by investigating advertising and promoting the Stronger Families Hub in additional languages, where feasible; and**
- 7) Investigate adding into the referral form process to explain why consent had not been obtained, where appropriate.**

### **Reasons for the recommendations**

The recommendations arising from this major review aim to support the Cabinet and Council in developing its Stronger Families Hub to be better equipped to support residents in need. The recommendations also aim to increase resident awareness of the Stronger Families Hub and the services available to them.

### **Alternative options considered/ risk management**

The Cabinet could decide to reject some, or all, of the Committee's recommendations or pursue alternative routes by which to progress the objectives of the review.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### About the Stronger Families Hub

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 key 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 service delivery model 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 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.

The vision of the Hub 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 Committee’s review

At its meeting on 20 July 2022, the Children, Families and Education Select Committee agreed to review how the Stronger Families Hub was functioning in practice since it was launched in August 2021. The review was intended to support the work of the service areas in helping to shape their ways of working; identifying areas of weakness and improving engagement with key stakeholders.

The following Terms of Reference were agreed by the Committee from the outset of the review:

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.

As part of its six witness and evidence sessions, the Committee received direct evidence from a very broad range of witnesses, including Council officers, young people and their parents/ carers, health partners and education partners:

- *Head of First Response and Out-of-Hours*
- *6 x Parents and Carers*
- *4 x Young People*
- *Triage Officer*
- *Interim MASH Manager*
- *Social Worker*
- *Out-of-Hours Team Manager*
- *Key Worker Team Manager*
- *Key Worker*
- *Assistant Director for Safeguarding Adults, Safeguarding Children and Children Looked After*
- *Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children (Hillingdon)/ CNWL Interim Head of Safeguarding Children*
- *Head of Children's Services, Hillingdon*
- *Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead – Ruislip High School*
- *Lead Safeguarding Officer – The Rosedale Hewens Academy Trust*
- *Team 1 Manager – Stronger Families Key Working (South East)*

Through the significant evidence and witness testimony received during the Committee's witness sessions, it was concluded that the Stronger Families Hub had been well operated and well received by all involved. Furthermore, that there were both opportunities and challenges for the Hub, particularly around awareness, accessibility and capacity.

The importance of resilience was stressed by the Committee, in particular the increased demand, whether the legacy from the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis or asylum-seeking children. Another area of focus was around the continued need to raise awareness of the Hub and the services it provides with all stakeholders.

In respect of Recommendation 7, the Committee were aware that the Stronger Families Hub was a consent-based service, and it was acknowledged that there may be some occasions where parental consent cannot be achieved and that this needed to be explained as part of the referral process.

The Committee were mindful of the linkages with the current review by the Health and Social Care Select Committee into Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs), which could support the role of the Hub in respect of signposting around mental health services.

The Committee concluded its review in October 2023, which incorporated seven key recommendations to Cabinet, seen as prudent, effective actions to support the Hub's operation and core purpose going forward.

The Committee's full review report is attached as an appendix.

### **Officer Comments on Recommendations**

The Corporate Director for Childrens Services welcomes the Committee's recommendations. The Stronger Families subgroup remains a part of Hillingdon's Safeguarding Childrens Partnership and whilst membership and their Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually, quarterly review of emerging issues will continue to take place. This will also be the forum for considering the outcome of the Health and Social Care Committees review, and in particular the strengthening pathways for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs) and other emotional and mental health support for children. Recommended alterations to the current Early Help Assessment will also be addressed by this group.

Demand and capacity review of the Stronger Families Hub is currently subject to review, to include consideration of any extension of the front door to services. The service area will continue to work with colleagues in corporate communications, transformation and our Chief Digital & Information Officer to ensure that our publicity and marketing is effective. This is enhanced by partnership cascade and multi-disciplinary work undertaken in communities.

### **Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial costs arising from the recommendations in this report, though if any initiatives are pursued by the Council, at that time a further financial analysis may be required. Demand and capacity review of the Stronger Families Hub is also currently subject to review as part of the Council's budget planning process.

## **RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION**

### **The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities**

The recommendations will improve the awareness and the resilience of the service delivered by the Stronger Families Hub to residents.

## **Consultation carried out or required**

The Committee sought a very broad range of resident, service user, internal and external witness testimony, as set out in the report.

## **CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Corporate Finance**

Corporate Finance have reviewed this report and concur with the Financial Implications set out above, noting that there are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations contained in this report.

### **Legal**

There are no legal implications arising from the recommendation set out within the report.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL.