

# 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*

<b>Committee name</b>	Children, Families & Education Select Committee
<b>Officer reporting</b>	Antony Madden, Assistant Director, First Response
<b>Papers with report</b>	Appendix A – feedback from residents
<b>Ward</b>	All

## HEADLINES

To review the recommendations made for Cabinet in the final report which detailed the major review conducted by the Children, Families and Education Select Committee in regard to the Stronger Families Hub.

## RECOMMENDATION

**That the Committee note the update**

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 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.

## **PERFORMANCE DATA**

### **The Committee's recommendations in practice**

#### **Raise the profile of the Stronger Families Hub with all Hillingdon stakeholders with a view to improving resident awareness of the Hub and the support available to them**

The profile of the Stronger Families Hub has continued to be raised with all stakeholders through the formation of the Stronger Families Partnership. This is a collaboration which has grown to a core membership of 100+ different partners in a wide range of settings including the third sector, health and education. Currently the quarterly Partnership meetings are chaired by the Assistant Director for First Response.

To further the work, The Stronger Families, Stronger Communities Partnership Event was held on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2024 organised by Stronger Families, Family Hubs and Hillingdon Youth Offer teams. The objectives for the event included gaining an understanding of what support is available for children aged 0-19 years (and up to 25 years with SEND) and their families across Hillingdon as well as to provide an opportunity to network, build strong links with other community-based support teams and identify areas of partnership working to respond to the needs of children, young people and their families at the earliest opportunity.

The agenda focused on the three Family Hub priorities of Access, Connection and Relationship and had speakers from Stronger Families, Parents, P3, Homestart, SEND Advisory Service, Axis, Community Safety, Health Visiting, Faith sector, young people, Family Hubs & Children's Centres and Hillingdon Youth Offer. There was table facilitators who were specialists in the topics from across different sectors with themes including: Asylum seekers & people new to the UK and help overcoming language barriers; Contextual safeguarding and community engagement; Mental health support; Parenting support & parental conflict; services relating to special educational needs and disabilities; Supporting low-income families, Employment Education and Training.

Outcomes for the event included that 31 people requested to join the partnership, who were not already part of this; 47 Said they would like more information on training available for this term; 26 Said they would like to have a license to access training through Learning Zone on the Council's website; 27 People said they would like to join the work going on to 'Make Hayes Safer'.

The event had a high attendance with 130 people including some elected members. Requests were made by many people to make this an annual event. Positive feedback included comments on the smooth running of the event, the partnership effort, and the overall organisation.

The Stronger Families Hub continues to use a range of mediums to communicate and engage with professionals such as via the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership and Children's Participation Team newsletters. This includes key agencies such as school and other education settings.

The Stronger Families Partnership is utilised as a conduit for the sharing of information, connecting partners and ensuring actions are progressed. The group has also sought to progress an action plan based on the feedback that came out of the discussion around Access and themed

table discussions. The Partnership appears to work well for sharing knowledge, information and advice in order to help identify gaps in provision and work together to address these.

A directory of services is in the latter stages of being developed with the aim of having a virtual place a family can visit and gain information or advice on a wide range of family issues spanning the 0-19 (25 with SEND). Work has been completed with the Hillingdon Youth Offer, Families' Information Service, Brokerage, Corporate Communications and the Digital & Intelligence team to agree a format for new directory and the categories of information that will be included. All 0-19 services in Hillingdon have been mapped with assistance from partners in order to inform and share the directory. To help address gaps in professionals knowledge of what support is available for families in Hillingdon a spreadsheet of services was shared as an interim measure prior to the Directory publication.

### **Maintain the resilience of the 24/7 Hub model by monitoring the staff and triage resourcing covering the out-of-hours service**

Since the review, recruiting for all vacant posts within the service has presented some challenges. Factors such as staff turnover, maternity leave, and reliance on locum cover have contributed to fluctuations in staffing levels. However, additional resources have been allocated, and concerted efforts are being made to fill all vacant posts, including triage officers. As of now, there remains one vacant triage officer post in the Stronger Families Hub.

Investments have been made to ensure the continuity of the service despite staffing variations, including the availability of overtime. The hub operates as part of the broader First Response service and receives support with staff and resources as needed, particularly during surges in demand or when large volumes of contacts are received in a short period.

It is important to highlight that that in light of national reforms to social care a full review of children's social care delivery model is in progress at this time. This is to ensure that the service is aligned with Families First Partnership and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Consequently, there is likely to be implications for the Stronger Families Hub including staffing and resourcing.

### **Review the capacity within the Hub to support increased demand, in particular from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving at Heathrow Airport**

The capacity of the Hub and service has been bolstered by the introduction of the Asylum Intake Team (as a pilot) who now work exclusively with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. This includes children who arrived via Heathrow Airport as well as those that were initially placed in contingency hotel accommodation by the Home Office in borough, subsequently claim to be children and are assessed as under the age of 18 by social workers.

In a challenging climate for the council and social care, retention and recruitment remains a priority. We are working closely with colleagues in recruitment to develop bespoke adverts to attract interest from potential employees. A number of open days have been held to enable face to face conversation with members of the public to take place as well as other initiatives such as exposure of the good practice taking place. In addition, all jobs advertised externally on our website are automatically posted on Indeed and LinkedIn and Children's Social Work for London.

As noted above, the service delivery model is under review to ensure that the Hub has sufficient

capacity to meet demand and has the inherent resilience to provide the right service at the right time for residents including children and their families. Central to this further capacity being built out of office hours to lessen the strain on staff during traditional working hours.

### **Review ways to enhance signposting around mental health services via the Hub and to voluntary and private sector services**

The sign posting to mental health services has been enhanced through the introduction of the Thrive practitioner who is based within Stronger Families. The Thrive Framework focuses on delivering mental health services for children, young people, and families. Of central importance is making professionals, families, and young people aware of the available services and reducing the stigma often associated with mental health.

Presently over 25 services for mental health, including both self-referral and referral services are available in Hillingdon. The need to make these services more accessible to families and young people remains an area of improvement and focus.

The need for a comprehensive directory of mental health services, accessible to both professionals and families remains evident. The directory is in the latter stages and will be user-friendly, ensuring that it includes information on all available services, including early intervention support. Categorising support under terms such as 'life issues', (as this is often how people search for support) is an example of how insights have been used to analyse and report the main themes coming through from young people, families with young children and parents.

The Stronger Families Partnership includes a voluntary sector representative as a core member. In addition the Stronger Communities leads remain core members to further the work with voluntary sector partners as well as faith and community groups.

### **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**

The work undertaken by the Stronger Families subgroup was time limited and has been concluded. The ethos of the work being undertaken by the subgroup evolved into a collaboration meeting, led by the Stronger Families Hub, held monthly with professionals from a range of agencies across the partnership. In order to further this work, including the progress made through the Family Hubs network, the Stronger Families Partnership has been meeting quarterly since January 2024 to raise awareness through the expansion of joint working and collaborative initiatives.

### **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**

The Stronger Families Hub website and landing pages can now be translated into 68 different languages. Once residents have selected their chosen language, they are automatically redirected to Google Translate. Google Translate is a free, automated service at no cost to the council. It is important to note that translations provided to users of the website are provided 'as is' and users must satisfy themselves as to their accuracy.

The most recent census data is utilised to help inform access to services to address barrier's such as English as a second language and/or speakers of other languages.

A cornerstone of the Stronger Families Partnership is its use as a mechanism for sharing information including to community groups and resident that may not be digitally enabled. Joint working with partners including the Family Hub's Network continues to focus on need for accessing support to be seamless. Feedback indicates that the Partnership seems to be effective for the sharing of knowledge, information and advice to help identify gaps in provision and work together to address these (as outlined in the Stronger Families Partnership Terms of Reference).

**Investigate adding into the referral form process to explain why consent had not been obtained, where appropriate.**

After further consideration and discussion it remains the consensus that including the option not to obtain consent would lead to delays that are detrimental to the family. Moreover a return to the difficulties of the past in obtaining consent would be highly likely which resulted in SFH staff spending prolonged periods of time seeking to contact families, many of whom were not aware that a referral had been made in the first instance.

In addition to, with the exception of child protection all early help and family support services are consent based so the need to be transparent with parents and carers remains of central importance; this includes obtaining consent in the first instance prior to an Early Help Assessment or referral being made. Consent is mandatory with the exceptions to this being that informing the parents would place the child or family at risk of significant harm and/or a referral is being made for a child missing from education or has poor attendance at school.

The form permits free text to be added by the referrer in order to detail the reason why consent was not obtained; urgent and safeguarding matters continue to be conveyed by telephone in order to avoid any delay and ensure all the necessary information is shared whether consent has been obtained or not.

## **RESIDENT BENEFIT**

*Please see appendix A for further information and feedback from residents.*

## **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.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL.

## APPENDIX A - FEEDBACK FROM RESIDENTS

### Children

*'S made me feel safe and have someone to talk to'.*

*'Nothing can be improved she was on my level'.*

*'Helped with my worries'*

*'I can talk to mummy, I worry less'.*

### Parents

*'We appreciate all the help you have given us. We enjoyed the time we were working with you. You have been very professional and helpful with the problems we had. We had issues we wanted to address regarding housing and schooling. You gave us both support and advice that was very helpful.'*

*'I understood a Cultural sort of Values and was not judged'.*

*'The Key Worker had a lot of knowledge and advise on dealing with the situation. She understood the issues and offered a lot of advice to us'.*

*'KW was a very good listener and understanding , she engaged very positively with me and my child'.*

*'No way to improve the service just keep doing what you doing'.*

*'She was brilliant support with me, M and school she made school listen when I could not'.*

*'Really supportive especially with the school I loved that straight away myself and M felt trusted and support from the KW'.*

*'I have learned a great deal from the Key worker, firstly I have learned it is ok to ask for help , secondly I have learned to pull together with my partner and finally, I have learned how to understand my child'.*

*'Helped me get the right Benefits, accompanied me to health appointments I would of cancelled otherwise and liaised with school about my sons behaviour'.*

*'Given me confidence in how I parent my child, advice in areas where I struggle especially behaviour management'.*

*'There is always room for improvement but I can honestly not think of anything to write as the service provided was everything and more'.*

*'I feel the Key worker was the very first person who put the effort in to understand our circumstances , I am very glad she appeared in our life'.*

*'I wanted to take a moment to express my sincerest thanks and appreciation for the outstanding work \*\*\* has done in supporting and safeguarding my daughter, \*\*\*. Over the past several weeks,*

*\*\*\* has had a profound impact on \*\*\* confidence and overall well-being. \*\*\* has developed a strong sense of trust with \*\*\*, often sharing her thoughts about school, her studies, and her challenges. This trust has allowed her to grow significantly, both in confidence and in honesty. \*\*\* natural ability to connect with children is truly remarkable. My wife and I have always felt that \*\*\* was in incredibly safe hands, which gave us great peace of mind as parents. \*\*\* has gone above and beyond in guiding \*\*\* to become a sincere, confident, and thoughtful young girl. The positive change we have seen in her is a testament to \*\*\* dedication and care. \*\*\* came into \*\*\* life at just the right time, offering the support she needed when she needed it most. Her influence and impact on our daughter will last a lifetime, and we are incredibly grateful for her role in \*\*\* upbringing. Thank you for having such a wonderful professional on your team. \*\*\* hard work and passion are truly appreciated, and we wanted to make sure her efforts are recognized.*

## **Professionals**

*‘I just wanted to thank you all for supporting our school coffee mornings here at \*\*\*. Our parents and carers have given some very positive feedback about the sessions which have generated a lot of interest and lively discussion. Please pass on our thanks to members of your teams who have attended on your behalf.’*

*‘\*\*\*\* came back to school yesterday and was in yesterday and today so a positive start. The feedback that I can give you is that you built a really good relationship with \*\*\*\* and she really liked your sessions. You were always reliable and gave really good feedback. All seemed to go really well, you were really approachable and always kept everyone in the loop. You also built a good relationship with the family.’*

*‘...thank you for attending yesterday, It was great to see you both. The ladies found it very useful indeed.’*

*‘Engagement with the family was seamless with the support of the key worker’.*

*The families situation improved because of the Key working support’.*