

# Children's Minister address to National Centre for Family Hubs

Good morning. Thank you, Peter [Fonagy], for your kind words and for inviting me to join you today. I am so excited to be here for this launch event.

I am delighted to have been appointed as Children and Families Minister. It's a role that I take enormous pride in. Education and in particular early years are at the heart of levelling up. This is the most incredible opportunity to play my part in ensuring every child and young person can achieve their potential.

And of course, not only does it start with but at its heart is the family.

The Children's Commissioner's 'Big Ask', launched in April this year, surveyed over half a million children and young people and found that one of the things they care most deeply about was being part of a happy home. And at the heart of home is a happy, loving family.

I know staff and professionals in local authorities, education settings, charities, and health and community organisations work tirelessly to help families. The pandemic made this challenge all the greater.

So, before I go any further I would like to thank you for your hard work and dedication. Your drive and commitment are valued not only by those of us who work in government but by the thousands of families you help on a daily basis.

I am looking forward to working with you all as we look to improve the life chances of children and young people. Why we are championing family hubs, and the principles of the model

So let me start by saying why the government is championing family hubs, as a way to do just that.

At their simplest, a family hub is where families with children of all ages know they can get help and support. They may go to a building, or they may access that help online – or maybe a mix of the two. The exact service offer will vary from place to place, as it should, reflecting the needs of the local population, but will have a great 'Start for Life' offer for parents, carers and babies at its core. Of course, this in itself is not a new idea. We have had family services, family support units, children's centres for many years.

But the family hub model builds on what we have learned, what local councils and professionals have learned, and what families have told us all, about how to give them the very best support we can – the support that they deserve. This is summarised in the three principles that characterise and define family hubs – access, connections, and relationships.

Let me start with access. We know how crucial it is that families know where to go for support, and that we make it easy as possible for them to find help when they need it.

Family hubs bring together services to support families from conception all the way up to young people of 19 – or up to 25 for special educational needs – and so can respond to the needs of the whole family. They create a clear access point, and a relationship with services that does not end as children grow older. Family hubs allow for both physical and virtual services to be brought under one banner, around which communications and outreach can be built, building awareness and trust among families. We have seen the value of online services and access points, and these are integral to the family hub model; but we know that access to face-to-face services remain as crucial as ever, and so the family hub building will remain at the heart of family help.

An example of this is Suffolk County Council, one of our research partners. They have identified a need for better reach and engagement with vulnerable families, and are working to ensure that families see the hub as a 'positive place' to go for children of all ages, not somewhere to go only when you have a problem.

An effective family hub acts a single 'front door', making it easier for families to navigate what can be a complex system. The aim is to make the family hub a non-stigmatising access point for universal services – such as those crucial Start for Life services – with additional help on offer for those who need it most.

The second principle is connection. Family hubs make it easier for families to know how and where to get help, then connection is key to ensuring they get what they need.

This is partly about co-location – bringing services together on a smaller number of sites. But while physical proximity can be important and helpful, that alone does not create the joined-up services that families need. That comes from effective governance, professional development, data sharing and integrated assessment, case management, and shared outcomes.

Of course, this is not what the phrase family hub should call to the minds of those who use them – that's for the likes of us to worry about. But families should feel it in their experience of using the hub – they tell their story once, and they are connected to the help they need.

And it is not just help from the local authority that should be available through a hub. The hub should connect families with services and support from others, in a joined up way – whether that is links to more targeted health services, links with schools and education settings, support from charity or community groups, or even other parents.

In my own county of Essex, some families received conflicting advice from professionals – the County Council has sought to address this as part of its family hub model, and trust between professionals and families has increased.

This leads me to my final principle, which is relationships. The family hubs model prioritises the relationships that carry us all through life, and building on family strengths, recognising that this is the way to lasting change. This idea is at the heart of everything that is done.

This principle reflects what Josh MacAlister has heard in his work on the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, and captured in the Case for Change.

Family hubs involve greater integration between the people, professionals and leaders that work with families.

Local authorities with a hub model have used this to drive changes and improvements in their work with families, placing a greater emphasis on relationships, and sustaining these as families and children grow. An example of this is Leeds, where building on community strengths and enhanced whole family working by professionals is key to their practice model.

I was so impressed when I saw a family hub in action last year. I visited Berechurch Family Hub near Colchester and saw first-hand the help and services they provide to Colchester's families and children.

It was a welcoming environment with passionate staff and I could see that it was making a real difference to the people who were using it.

What I have talked about today, is not a blueprint that has been designed up from scratch in a Whitehall department. It is the product of the professionalism, endeavour, leadership and innovation of those in Colchester and, Essex around the country.

The Government believes in the family hub model. So what are we are going to do to drive this forward?

One of the first steps we took was to establish the [National Centre for Family Hubs](#), and this event today is an important moment. The National Centre will provide expert advice and guidance and work with local authorities to champion the family hub approach. I am grateful to the Anna Freud Centre and very much look forward to working with you.

We have also announced a £12 million family hubs [Transformation Fund](#) to support around 12 local authorities in England to open family hubs. This first fund will enable us to learn more about the process of local transformation, build our evidence base, and create valuable resources and learning for those local authorities who follow. Start for Life will be a key element of each of these projects.

I am pleased to announce that from today the fund is open to applications from local authorities. We have also published Transformation Fund [application guidance](#), which includes further information around the three principles for family hubs, which local authorities may find helpful in designing and developing their proposals.

As I have set out, if we are to achieve our ambitions for family hubs, there

are many “behind the scenes” challenges to overcome so that families experience effective joined up services. Data and digital are key. We are working with a number of local authorities to identify solutions.

My Department has already begun this work with local authorities in Bristol and Lancashire.

And, I am delighted to announce that Salford, Suffolk, and Tower Hamlets will join this stream of work, following a successful second round of recruitment for this project.

Having a strong evidence base is vital in making change effective and taking the right approaches. Our investment in an evaluation innovation fund is building this evidence base to help us understand what really works for family hubs and ultimately to improve outcomes for children and families. We have commissioned Ecorys UK to work with local authorities in Bristol, Essex, Leeds, Sefton and Suffolk and also Sheffield Hallam University to work with the local authority in Doncaster.

We have today published some of the [early learning](#) from this work, which you will hear more about through colleagues at today’s conference.

Now some even more exciting news. As you may have seen over the past week, the Chancellor announced a significant £500 million package for families.

This includes a £300 million package to transform services for parents and babies, carers and children in half of the local authorities across England.

It will provide thousands of families access to support when they need it. It includes funding to create a family hub network, for local authorities to publish their Start for Life offer, support for breast feeding, parent-infant relationships and parenting programmes.

The package also includes a smaller number of pilots to trial and evaluate innovative workforce models needed to support babies and families.

Altogether, this will provide thousands of families access to support when they need it. We are delivering on the [Best Start for Life Report](#), and on our manifesto commitment to champion Family Hubs.

I am very grateful to Dame Andrea Leadsom for this important review and for her commitment to this work. I’m proud that this package also goes even further to deliver on our manifesto commitment to champion family hubs and to provide vulnerable families with the intensive, integrated support they need, through the £200m expansion of the Supporting Families programme. More information on these significant investments will come soon.

I want support for families to be a golden thread that runs through government. Dame Andrea and I will continue to work collaboratively to ensure that the critical 1,001 days are central to our work on Family Hubs.

We are also working with other parts of government such as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with the Supporting Families

programme, and the Reducing Parental Conflict programme led by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Let me finish by saying that today's event and the launch of our first £12 million Family Hubs Transformation Fund is very much the beginning of the conversation on family hubs. We know there is much more to do, to learn, and to build, working with you all. What we have published today is very far from the last word, in fact it is quite the opposite – and we want to hear from you, and work with you to make sure that we realise the potential of family hubs. It is a hugely exciting time.

Thank you for being here and for playing a part in this important agenda.