



Family Hubs Needs Assessment

Executive Summary



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

About Family Hubs and Start for Life

The Family Hubs programme is led by the Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). The key objective is to join up and enhance services delivered through local physical and virtual Family Hubs, ensuring all parents and carers can access the support they need when they need it.

Family Hubs are expected to provide a single point of entry to the wider system of support for families as well as providing a key delivery mechanism for Start for Life which provides specific focus the first 1001 critical days of a child's life and focussing on infant feeding; perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships; parenting and the home learning environment.

Family Hubs in Bedford Borough

Bedford Borough has opened two Family Hubs in what were Queens Park and Pine Cones Children's Centres. These locations were chosen as data shows they are home to families and communities who may not easily access wider services and support. Plans are being implemented to open both sites for extended hours, co-locate a range of services and to better integrate and increase access to support for families. A long-term plan for further Family Hubs across Bedford Borough is being developed and Hubs in Kempston and the town centre will be in place by March 2025.

About the Family Needs Assessment

The aim of the family needs assessment is to build a shared understanding of families' needs, to support the development of Family Hubs in Bedford Borough. Family needs are ongoing and change and this assessment should be seen as part of a continuing processes to share information across services and draw on the experiences of parents and carers to build a picture of need and improve access to support.

The needs assessment is based on:

- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) data and multi-agency service data
- Insight from two workforce events and 23 interviews with staff across the system
- Discussions with 66 parent/carers in groups and individually across 8 venues (including an online dads focus group)
- Online survey with parents/carers (617 Responses).



Key findings

Partnership working

In Bedford Borough, there is a strong base of partnership working and system offer across services to meet the different issues experienced by families. However, as is the case nationally, the capacity of core services is stretched, and this affects the availability and accessibility of support in a timely manner. This particularly applies to health services, mental health support and support for families with special needs.



Key outcome areas



Family Hubs can help meet the needs of families in Bedford Borough and address health inequalities by enabling parents to access the information and support they need, when they first need it. There is a role for the whole workforce to work together to improve families' access and engagement in existing public sector and community support, particularly in the following outcome areas:

Perinatal health and support

- Early access to maternity care, particularly among minority ethnic communities.
- Infant mortality and stillbirths – proactively supporting parents to understand and access support that will help them have a healthy pregnancy (addressing smoking, obesity and consanguinity) and providing consistent



messages around safe sleeping, alcohol and home safety.

- Early identification of perinatal mental health needs and supporting parents to access appropriate support.
- Breastfeeding rates in the first 10 days – and ongoing support to maintain rates in the longer term.

Family Health



- Childhood immunizations, particularly the second dose MMR vaccination.
- The NHS Core20plus5 priorities – asthma, epilepsy, diabetes, oral health and mental health.
- Childhood obesity by up to the age of 11.
- Substance misuse in young people, and emerging incidents of young people vaping and self-medicating for ADHD with drugs and/or alcohol.
- Domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health issues (parent/carer).

Family support



- Actively encourage parents to access Children's Centres and Family Hubs which offer a wide range of universal activities and support, including evidence-based parenting programmes and small groups for specific parents.
- Access to support whilst waiting for ADHD/Autism diagnosis and emotional wellbeing and mental health support for young people.



- Children on the periphery of exploitation.
- Financial security, particularly as the impact of cost of living takes hold.
- Secure housing.

Education



- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) outcomes, particularly around communication, language and literacy related needs – and particularly for families with Black children.
- Attainment at KS2, particularly for those accessing free school meals.
- Outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs (SEND), particularly in mainstream schools.



What families have told us...

Some families find it much harder than others to access the information and support they need. Often, this is because families and professionals are not aware of the many activities, services and thriving community networks that exist within Bedford Borough's local communities, including the children's centres. Many families do not speak English as their main language and this remains a barrier across many key services.

Other families, particularly those who are experiencing a range of challenges, or those who may have had poor past experiences, feel more comfortable accessing community led services where there is more capacity for individual support or in smaller groups. Some parents/carers lack confidence and/or hold preconceptions about Children's Centres that prevent them from accessing support there. There are some excellent examples of community led provision and outreach work that are supporting families to obtain support they otherwise may not have accessed.



Families suggested a range of support they would like to see from Children's Centres and Family Hubs and these align with national expectations. It is very clear from the needs assessment that many parents are not able to access services at the time they are on offer. Families need more flexible opening hours, a physical and virtual offer and more help to find trusted information and support. Families would welcome being able to access a wide range of whole family support from Family Hubs. Holiday activities and after-school care/clubs are commonly highlighted as a gap.

Parents need the workforce to be welcoming, non-judgmental and proactively curious about the challenges they might be having. This will support the building of trusted parent-professional relationships and create an environment conducive to sharing 'difficulties' when they arise. Particular groups, such as dads, parents of children with SEND and those isolated e.g. by rurality, language, culture, lack of car or working hours need more opportunities to develop online and physical peer support in local venues.



Dads contributing to the needs assessment did not commonly use social media for information and support. They need physical opportunities to meet other fathers (with and without their children) to build confidence in their parenting role and for mutual support around common challenges. There are a range of families who have multiple difficulties who would benefit from greater outreach and community led support, who often live in deprived areas of Bedford Borough.

Areas to Develop

In the light of the needs analysis, areas for consideration in developing Family Hubs include:

1

Improve accessibility of information and raise awareness of what is on offer and how to access it.

Flexibility around opening hours and hybrid delivery, including holiday activities and wraparound support.

2

3

Workforce development to build a consistently welcoming, proactive, culturally sensitive and relationship building approach across all services.

Continuing to strengthen professional networks and the workforce's ability to know what support is available for whom.

4

5

A greater focus on building family hub 'spokes' through outreach and working with trusted community groups and venues - taking support out to communities and to vulnerable groups.

6

Facilitating peer support opportunities, particularly for support of seldom heard or isolated families.

Continue to develop co-production as 'a way of working' including going out to parents where they are.

7

8

Considering ways of normalising the use of Children's Centres to familiarise families with what is on offer at an earlier stage, building on co-location with maternity services and potentially birth registration.

Continuing to share information across agencies to understand emerging issues and to measure performance.

9

10

Importance of the third family hub focusing more on older children and working with community groups, schools and young people to identify and develop an appropriate venue/mobile option and operational model. There is a need to provide easier access to a wide range of support for parents and older children including building emotional wellbeing, help with homework clubs and support the growing number of older children with SEND.

Bedford Borough Population Data - Snap shot



High population growth
over the last ten years



Around 11,000 children aged 0-4

Around 34,000 children over five years old



Around 2,223 babies
are born each year



Nearly 1/3 of births are to women of
ethnic minorities, nationally this is 1/4.



Most 0-4 year olds live in Queens
Park, Cauldwell, Goldington and
Kingsbrook wards.



Around 5,600 0-15 year olds live
in relative low income families



Some of the 10-20% most deprived
areas in England are in Castle Newnham,
Harpur, Greyfriars and Cauldwell wards.



Numbers of looked after children and children with Special
Educational Needs (SEN) statements and Education and
Health Care (EHC) plans (at 2019) have increased.



Fewer young people are not in education,
employment or training (NEET) than
comparator local areas in the same
deprivation decile (IMD2019).

Finding out more

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