

Children & Family Hubs



4Children's integrated model for effective children and family support

4Children's proposal to redesign and overhaul the delivery of services and support for children, young people and families - from Early Intervention to social care - by extending Sure Start Children's Centres to create a new local infrastructure of Children and Family Hubs: using money and resources more efficiently; doing more and doing it better; utilising the strength of families in their communities to improve lives now and for the future; and making Britain great for children and families.



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1. Summary

Evidence tells us that children and family services are not working together as they should and all too often people still don't know where to go to get help. Children and Family Hubs are proposed as a "game changer" for public services, building on a tried and tested approach in Sure Start Children's Centres to extend their reach to wider services and social care that delivers better outcomes for all.

TRIED and TESTED

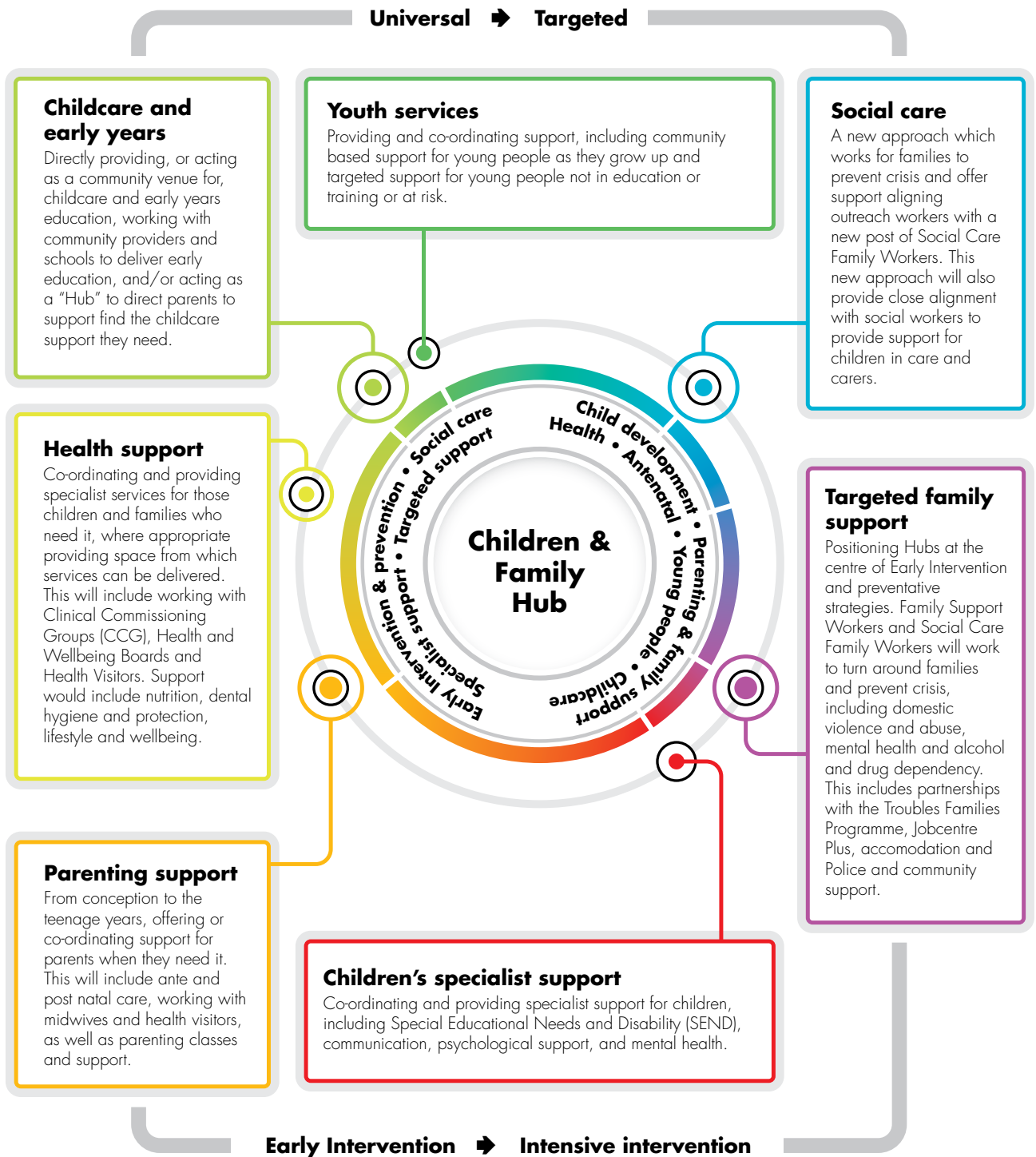
- Experience of service delivery across the country means that it is already known what type of support works well
- Existing infrastructure is already in place across the country in the shape of Sure Start Children's Centres and offers the opportunity to build and expand upon
- The strong and trusted brand of Sure Start Children's Centres enhances this, based on the strength of the relationship between staff and the families they support
- Further trials would be easy and would demonstrate impact and value before rolling out nationally over the next Parliament

INNOVATIVE and RADICAL

- A "whole family" approach would provide a trusted "gateway" for family support, with the services and support needed all easily accessible from one place
- Early help and intervention at its heart would identify issues long before they've become a problem to solve
- It would work across all ages, including all children and young people 0-19 years, as well as parents
- Joined-up and integrated working between different sectors would become the bedrock everywhere getting the right help to those who need it, when they need it
- Additional capacity would be created for social care workers by creating a new post of Social Care Family Workers, revolutionising support in this area

EFFECTIVE and WORKS

- Improving the lives of, and long-term outcomes for, families and children
- Spending more effectively so that local authorities are able to better direct limited resources to those who need extra help
- Building a better society and local areas to live in by providing early help for families so that problems don't spiral out of control
- Empowering communities and families, offering a new local, community focused response to services



2. Introduction to our proposed model

Whilst life for children and families has changed dramatically over the last 30 years, services and support have often struggled to keep up. We need a new local infrastructure for services and support for children and families that provides the integrated early support, from Early Intervention to social care, that they need.

Services aren't keeping up with family life and with unprecedented pressure on budgets, too many families aren't getting the help they need. Silo-working, late intervention and lack of responsiveness to the needs of families is not only leading to a confusing bureaucratic maze but more importantly to serious failings for children. Families need joined-up, easy to understand, and easy to access services which they can trust.

We need a new local infrastructure for services and support for children, young people and families - from Early Intervention to social care. That's why 4Children is working with local authorities to develop new Children and Family Hubs. These are game changers for children and families building on the tried and tested work of Sure Start Children's Centres. We believe that – rolled out nationally – they can not only deliver the improvements those local authorities we are working with are already receiving, but would do even more by building these new "Hubs" in as the core of a new approach for social care that works. This at a time when it is too often failing to protect across so many areas.

We believe there should be one of these new and expanded "Hubs" at the heart of every community for support and advice, bringing together and coordinating services, from midwives and health visitors to childcare and support for young people, building Early Intervention in at the core, and including support for families with complex needs, safeguarding, child protection and social care. This extended and new approach, building on the existing infrastructure, can provide the springboard needed to revolutionise wider services and social care into an integrated family approach. In summary, the approach would:

- Extend all Sure Start Children's Centres into local Children and Family Hubs
- Further embed these at the heart of their communities, bringing together local support and resources in a joined-up way
- Continue with their existing strength of providing universal as well as targeted services, building Early Intervention and help at their core, as well as providing support for families with complex needs
- Support children as they grow up, from 0-19 years
- Be part of a wider overhaul of social care, with these Hubs at the heart

Building on the good work of Sure Start Children's Centres to date, we believe there is a real opportunity to do much more, and do it even better to reach, support and improve the lives of every family and child who needs extra and additional help, and particularly those who are on the "edge of crisis". 4Children is therefore proposing to create a new approach to joined-up local services that scales-up for the whole country, bringing into every community the entire breadth of services and support that all families need.

This will mean all children and family service professionals – including those working in schools, the police force, and GPs – getting away from silo-working and working in a much more joined-up way, supporting the whole family. This matters, whether it's about improving the support for every family on day-to-day basis, or – at the other extreme, as recent Serious Case Reviews in Rotherham and Rochdale have all too tragically shown – ensuring that children are not ignored and abuse spotted before it's too late.

No other part of our national infrastructure offers the same opportunity presented by the network already in place through Sure Start Children's Centres, even more so from the strength and reputation of the brand and the trusted relationship staff have built up in their communities, than the physical spaces and buildings in which their activities and services are delivered. Schools may be trusted, but have limited scope for expansion into wider areas of service delivery; GP surgeries are neither seen as being family friendly in the first place¹, nor have the potential to expand and do anything else. Sure Start Children's Centres, on the other hand, have the ability to expand their offer locally to do exactly what the local needs of families require, and in relation to almost anything that might affect them.

They are also able to expand the activities and services they offer "beyond the doors" of the Centres themselves, acting as a single central point from which they can direct to a host of additional services that might be taking place – under their own brand – in other community venues and assets, which might include libraries, schools, village halls etc., again depending upon local circumstances and need, and to reach those families where specific help and support is needed.

¹ Figures from YouGov Plc. carried out for 4Children. Total sample size was 2,221 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 20th-23rd December 2013 [see associated Media Release 15.01.14] <http://www.4children.org.uk/News/Detail/Leading-Charity-Calls-for-National-Overhaul-of-Britains-Public-Services-and-Neighbourhoods-to-Support-Families-and-Prevent-Crisis>

3. Background: Why new solutions are needed

We know that a good childhood sets children up for life, leaving them more likely to be healthy, to form positive relationships, to learn and to be in employment in later life. And we know that parents across the country want the best for their children. But for too many the odds remain stacked against them.

Families are our country's greatest assets but too many are currently struggling to get the help they need and being held back as a result. The statistics demand that we do better. Recent years have shown improvements in outcomes for children in some areas, for example the increase in the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (the EYFSP²). However, there are still many areas where challenges remain. For example, in relation to this same Early Years Foundation Stage, figures show that children in disadvantaged areas continue to achieve well less than their peers in advantaged areas, with the disadvantaged gap remaining static. There are many more statistics which demonstrate the scale of the challenge (see Appendix A), particularly in the area of improving educational and health outcomes and child protection. There is much more to do if all children are to get the support they need to flourish.

Reduced budgets and changing local need means that services are being reviewed and reconfigured in every area. The challenge is to how to provide joined-up, effective and responsive help for all children and families, with specialist support for those with more complex needs. Increasingly this means:

- Support and advice available for all families in every community
- A more family-centred holistic approach, led by need
- More effective integration of partners' services
- Early preventative support to identify issues early, rather than solving them once they have happened
- Coordination of specialist and targeted services for those who need extra help, particularly those on the "edge of care"

We know that since their introduction, Sure Start Children's Centres have led the way in offering integrated support around the needs of children and families (see Appendices B and C for further details). They have become invaluable community resources with over a million families relying on their services³. Over the last decade and more over £10 billion has been invested to create a new "public service"

of more than 3,000 Centres. Since their establishment they have already begun to change the face of family services: identifying disadvantaged families and providing specific support where they need it. They have also marked a shift towards multi-agency working and – to differing degrees in different areas – are bringing together health, education, family support and specialist support.

Sure Start Children's Centres already present a beacon for what sort of direction we might wish service delivery to take in the future. We need to learn lessons from everything we know about what already works well, building on their strengths in communities. Since their conception they have already begun to provide a community-based, integrated and holistic "family-centred" approach which puts power in the hands of people. Where they have worked best their place as an accepted and highly trusted asset for family support has been truly cemented.

"In order to nurture strong and stable families in our most difficult communities and to put this, rightly, at the heart of a social justice policy programme we [recommend the] creation of a network of local Family Hubs to replace Sure Start Children's Centres and put vital services under one roof. They would be one stop shops for parenting and relationship support, birth registration and early years care as well as referrals to supporting agencies helping more troubled families"

Centre for Social Justice, 2014⁴

2 Department for Education (2014) Early years foundation stage profile results: 2013 to 2014 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2013-to-2014>

3 4Children (2014) Sure Start Children's Centre Census 2014 <http://www.4children.org.uk/Resources/Detail/Children-Centres-Census-2014>

4 Centre for Social Justice (2014) Breakthrough Britain 2015 - An overview <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/publications/breakthrough-britain-2015-an-overview>

4. Building on the work of Sure Start Children's Centres as "social work glue"

Particular challenges remain around the delivery of social care for children, with overstretched services and a rising number of children in need. The most significant and fundamental extension of services and support that our proposed model would deliver would be in the area of children's social care.

A key aspect, or lesson, from which our proposed model has emerged is the fact that many really effective Sure Start Children's Centres are already providing support that can turn families around, including those at the edge of care, with a "family-based" approach that means that they give the "social glue" which provides support for overstretched social work staff. We believe that there would be real potential benefits from extending all Centres to work more formally in the areas of social care and child protection. Formalising the relationship would enable services to work together, with families as part of a team, to deliver specialist interventions (including "step up" and "step down" support⁵). We believe this would provide a platform from which social care and child protection, currently overstretched and failing in too many areas to protect children, could be transformed.

So, why would this work now? Could existing Centres act as the central hub around which local and community services aimed at children and families can come together? Not with the Centre itself doing it all and providing the services themselves, but acting as a real enabler for community engagement and partnership to deliver better outcomes. We believe they can, and that approximately 30-40% are already working in a very similar – albeit informal – way already, working closely with social care, and already providing this level of support. More could be done easily, and the 2014 Sure Start Children's Centre Census³ conducted by 4Children has found that almost all Centres (97%) are working with social care services and partners.

The same survey has also found an existing and ongoing major shift of Sure Start Children's Centres already taking place from universal to targeted and complex support over recent years. At those Centres already working in the area of social care, the "family-based" approach being taken to do this means that they are already giving the "social glue" which provides crucial support for overstretched social work staff yet, to date at least, on a less formal basis. These support workers are already working closely with social care workers at many Centres, referring on "Level 3" cases⁶, where the child has increasing and complex needs and demands to address, and or where they can sometimes take

on these cases themselves. We know that in these cases Sure Start Children's Centres are already lifting the strain from overloaded social care workers.

This work and support already being undertaken in many areas has helped change the nature of support for children and families in many areas. But 4Children believes this can be taken forward in a way that can be used to truly revolutionise the social care system: formalising and putting rigour around the concept of the Hub, and professionalising the role of the highly dedicated family support worker within this. This would be a new class of children and families staff working alongside full social workers: the Social Care Family Worker (a concept long held by 4Children).

That's certainly not doing down the good work that so many social workers already undertake with families. That must continue, but within our proposed new approach they will be allowed to focus on those areas where their skills and strengths are really needed: undertaking complex cases; and providing professional support and mentoring to these new Social Care Family Workers based at the Children and Family Hub. It is an approach that recognises not all work needs to be carried out by the social worker, and builds a framework of quality, practice and procedures upon the existing infrastructure in the form of the more than 3,000 Sure Start Children's Centres. This is not just in terms of physical infrastructure like buildings, but more importantly the strength of the existing staff and the relationships they have – and continue to build – with the families within their own communities.

5 The "step up" process is used where children and family workers are considering whether a specialist service should lead on the case, going forward; the "step down" process is where specialist providers consider whether, on conclusion of their specialist intervention, children and family workers should resume with providing support

6 "Level 3" cases are where the staff working with children, young people and/or their parents/carers are able to contribute to assessing, planning, intervening and evaluating the needs of a child or young person and parenting capacity where there are safeguarding/child protection concerns. These are cases with complex needs, where health or development is being impaired or there is a high risk of impairment

5. Our proposed approach and model in detail

Children and Family Hubs are proposed as a “game changer” for public and community services, building on the tried and tested approach established through Sure Start Children’s Centres, integrating services and extending reach to wider services and social care, and delivering better support and outcomes for families and children as they grow up (0-19 years).

5.1. Building on existing infrastructure

The approach of our radical new model builds on an existing infrastructure which would provide the springboard needed to revolutionise wider services and social care into an integrated family approach, and weld Early Intervention into children and family services to identify problems before they escalate. The Hubs would offer community-led support and advice to all families in every community, and also coordinate specialist and targeted services for those who need extra help, including social care. These new arrangements could be a platform for transformation for social care and child protection. Expanded Sure Start Children’s Centres would be the natural home for coordinating these services even more widely given they have already been doing excellent work to integrate support for some of the most disadvantaged families.

Yet Sure Start Children’s Centres have been under considerable pressure over recent years, particularly from overall budget cuts and 4Children’s most recent Centre Census³ reveals that there have been big changes taking place, many in response to this. For example, over the coming year, over half expect their Centre model to change (52%); know there will be a decline in budget over the coming year (52%); and say that the services they provide will be changing (57%). Three-quarters say that there will be a change in the balance between universal and targeted services, with the majority of these moving towards more targeting.

Some of the changes taking place – both in response to these pressures, but also due to changing priorities – lead directly into the model we are proposing. Yet, at the same time, there are some key areas where existing government policy (or, more accurately, that of the next incoming government after the General Election in May 2015) needs to take action, in particular to ensure that the network retains the core strengths we believe that can be built on further still: notably its national reach and coverage across the country, particularly to the most vulnerable families; and its strength in building family relationships and trust, backed up in particular through its core “open door” universal offer.

There should therefore not be any further budget cuts to Sure Start Children’s Centres - nationally and locally. Sure Start Children’s Centres are an investment to save – but, by definition, to achieve those savings investment is required.

The overall budget allocated specifically for the Early Years and Sure Start Children’s Centres over the last three years has been cut and has been 20% lower than it would otherwise have been⁷, putting strain on the delivery of services directly through Sure Start Children’s Centres themselves. However, at the same time, there has been additional money allocated for the early years in recent years through the two-year-old offer for free childcare – this will be £760m for 2014-15 across England⁸. There will also be an additional £50m from April 2015 for the introduction of the Early Years Pupil Premium. So, there is a lot of money being allocated to the Early Years, but the benefits of which are not as yet being felt by the sector. This at a time more families than ever before in the most deprived areas of the country are turning to their local Sure Start Children’s Centre for support, will impact on these children and families in terms of the network of services and support available to them and the ability to expand to a broader range of support, including social care, as we propose. Central Government should, as a minimum, pledge not to implement any further cuts to this budget. The network should also be placed on a statutory footing, along a similar basis to schools, to ensure they become a central feature of a thriving community for all families to offer support and advice

Sure Start Children’s Centres’ services have become increasingly targeted, particularly at the most disadvantaged families. Again, this shift in focus supports the proposed direction of travel in which our new model would take the delivery of children and family services. Given the need for more support for our most vulnerable families, we support further increases in the scope and availability of targeted services. However, any further reductions in the universal provision on offer could put this at risk and potentially create an unhelpful reputation for Sure Start Children’s Centres as a provider of services focused specifically on “failing” families. This could potentially hinder their ability to reach exactly those who need their services most. Therefore, particularly as our model of Hubs is rolled out, it is essential that whilst increasing targeted support the network retains a baseline remit of universality, an approach known to be the most effective way of reaching disadvantaged families in the first instance for services such as childcare, health checks and “stay and play” sessions.

⁷ Department for Education (2014) Planned expenditure on schools, education and children’s services <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/planned-expenditure-on-schools-education-and-childrens-services>

⁸ Department for Education (2013) Free childcare extended to working families on low incomes <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/free-childcare-extended-to-working-families-on-low-incomes>

5.2. Providing “whole family” support

Although still in their relative infancy, many Centres are already providing the building blocks for the wider integration of services, something evidence consistently shows is needed. Hubs would enable and pioneer a wider “whole family” approach, bringing together and coordinating an even broader range of support that would enable all services to work with the whole family in a coherent and joined-up way. The “whole family” model developed by 4Children sets out the approach that we believe will make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable children and families through Hubs:

- By “breaking the cycle” of intergenerational problems through holistic family support
- Through Early Intervention, before problems turn into crisis
- By offering “turnaround” support for those families and individuals in crisis (which is an inevitable point, even with Early Intervention measures in place, some will reach)

The approach is inclusive of each of the following:

- Early Intervention measures, targeting issues as quickly and early as possible before they escalate into more serious issues, and avoiding repetition
- Proportionate responses for those children and families who are “just coping” and on the edge of crisis
- A targeted and evidence-based approach for those children and families who are in the greatest need
- On those rare occasions where the “whole family” approach does not work, then the response must focus solely on providing improved outcomes for the children and young people themselves.

“A pre-emptive, early approach not only has the potential to improve the lives of children and families, but also represents an intelligent approach to spending – with possible long term savings as a result.”

Early Intervention Foundation, 2014⁹

5.3. Integrating services

As our model for Children and Family Hubs is rolled-out nationally there needs to be consideration of where Centres are already at in terms of integration with other service providers. Evidence, from 4Children’s latest (2014) Sure Start Children’s Centre Census³ shows that targeted services for the most vulnerable families are increasingly widespread. We know that from family intervention to safeguarding, Sure Start Children’s Centres achieve most at the heart of an Early Intervention strategy, with targeted support linked in when crisis hits. This progress has been made in the toughest circumstances. The question now is what Centres could achieve if the network was further invested in and built upon. There are two key and interrelated areas where enhanced integration can be built: partnership working and data sharing.

On partnership working, our 2014 Census³ has found that integration with health is already well established, and increasing. The regulations¹⁰ already require that Sure Start Children’s Centres occupy a central position in the delivery of the Healthy Child programme, as well as having access to a named health visitor. But this can be enhanced further still and both local authorities and Health and Wellbeing boards should put Centres at the heart of their Early Intervention and preventative strategies, with a real opportunity to act as a wider community base for health. This will be particularly the case once Health and Wellbeing Boards become much more aligned with local authorities from 2015. The network has real potential to deliver and co-ordinate vital support from conception to age two, including the delivery of perinatal services including midwives, health visitors, social workers and (for 0-18 years) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

A second area of increasing partnership working already in place concerns the Troubled Family Programme, and we know³ that just over half (54%) of Centres are already doing this. The potential role in the delivery of the Troubled Families Programme at a local level needs to be maximised, recognising the announcement made in mid-2014 that the programme is being extended in its next stage to work with families with under-5s, and bring in a wider focus on health outcomes. All Centres should be integrated into, and at the heart of the programme’s delivery, as it goes forward as proposed to support a further 340,000 families over the next five years.

9 Early Intervention Foundation <http://www.eif.org.uk/ourwork/>

10 Department for Education (April 2013) Sure Start children’s centres statutory guidance: For local authorities, commissioners of local health services and Jobcentre Plus https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/273768/childrens_centre_stat_guidance_april_2013.pdf

Data sharing remains a concern for many Centres, and has been raised in many assessments including inquiries by the Education Select Committee and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children's Centres¹¹. A recent "task and finish" group's report "Information Sharing in the Foundation Years"¹², has highlighted information exchange about young children as an issue for all agencies providing education, health and social care services, stating that local authorities struggle to get basic information from the health service about live births, so that Sure Start Children's Centres can let new parents know about the services they offer; the health service struggles to get information about what schools children attend so that school nurses can pass on vital information about healthcare needs to teachers.

Ensuring families know about and have access to Centres in their local area is critical, yet a recent report from the Children's Society¹³ has found that almost half of local authorities do not routinely share live birth with Centres in their area, something that would help them to identify and reach out to families in the first instance.

Notwithstanding concerns over data protection, which we believe can be easily resolved, we know that this would have real benefits for the ability of Centres to identify families in need, for greater joined-up working, and ensuring the right help is getting to the people who need it, when they need it. In the area of health, for example, there needs to be a presumption of sharing of data between health visitors, midwives, social workers and Centres in order to target services effectively. This would include live birth data, helping Centres to identify families in their "reach" area much more easily. Services would benefit from sharing across all areas, including police, social care, and others. This is something that would extend to, and underpin the workings of, our new Hubs model, as it would address one of the most challenging barriers that have been identified relating to different cultures of working and lack of trust between different groups, and the recommendation made to government for integrated teams working together from Sure Start Children's Centres, with health visitors as the crucial "bridge" to the GP practice and to school nurses⁷.

5.4. Providing 0-19 years support

A core element of the new Hubs would be the innovation of working across the whole life of a child as they grow up, and offering support across the whole 0-19 years age range. This would enable support for all children, young people and families to be brought together within the local community. We know from where this already happens that this covers the whole "life journey" from pregnancy right through to a child's teenage years, where appropriate to local demands and resource allocation, an approach that 4Children has long championed and is already in place in many local authority areas.

Our Sure Start Children's Centres have demonstrated that such services can be effectively co-located and "co-produced" to ensure that children and young people are able to access support whenever they need it, throughout the 0-19 years age range, without losing contact with service providers at key points of transition or development in their lives. In our own existing 0-19 years Centres we work with local youth services and other key partners to deliver alternative education programmes to Year 9 and Year 11 pupils who are at risk of exclusion, including formal and informal education options. During evening and weekend hours the Centres offer a range of social and personal development activities.

11 All Party Parliamentary Sure Start Group (2013) Best Practice for a Sure Start: The Way Forward for Children's Centres <http://www.4children.org.uk/Files/cffc42fe-49eb-43e2-b330-a1fd00b8077b/BestPracticeforaSureStart.pdf>

12 Gross J (2013) Information Sharing in the Foundation Years 'Task and Finish' Group http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2013/11/Information_Sharing_in_the_Foundation_Years_Report.pdf

13 Children's Society (2014) The right start: How to support Early Intervention through initial contact with families http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/live_birth_data_report_final.pdf

Case study:

Carousel Children's Centre – a Centre providing support to the whole family, and children 0-19 years

4Children's Carousel Children's Centre – run in partnership with Essex County Council – offers a much wider range of support for children and families than a traditional "Sure Start" Children's Centre. This includes adult education, partnership services with health services including a paediatrician, a youth club six days a week, a 72 place nursery, an out-of-school club, and substantial extended services working with the whole family across the entire 0-19 year's age range. With its wider role as an 'integrated' family hub, and Family Outreach Workers to work with vulnerable and hard to reach families at the earliest stage, Carousel is our exemplar Centre and has very much informed the development of the concept of

an extended network of *Children and Family Hubs* as proposed in this paper.

Opened in May 2006 the flagship centre has pioneered the 4Children approach to fully integrated service provision and facilities for children. Carousel is located in an area of acute deprivation with issues around teenage parenting, worklessness and child poverty and provides particular early help and intervention to stop crisis, including areas of specialist and intensive support, including issues such as domestic violence or alcohol and drug abuse.

5.5. Enhancing existing services including childcare

Children and Family Hubs would provide a wide range of family support, across both targeted and universal services. There are a range of areas in which our proposed model should also support expansion. This could include the development of a volunteer "peer programme" to support "hard to reach" families; increased direction and provision of relationship support for couples and family therapy; more widespread fathers' groups; expansion of Jobcentre advice sessions, particularly for the 16-18 years old age group. However, the exact make-up and mix of services being provided should always be determined by local circumstances and be based around the needs of families and what works best – as part of a "family-led" approach – to improve their lives.

There is one area however where we believe a large proportion of Centres are providing support, but where there is real potential for more to be done, and that is childcare support. Our own analysis³ has calculated that the network has the ability to more than double the number of childcare places being provided, and make a particular contribution to the delivery of the offer of free places for two-year-olds. There should therefore be a duty on local authorities to make efforts to deliver early education childcare places for two, three and four-year-olds where a shortfall of places is identified as part of their duty to assess local provision and

secure sufficient. Centres could either provide this childcare directly themselves, or "open up their doors" to become a community space with delivery by other providers/partners.

This would be supported further by expanding the support for free early years childcare support from 15 to 25 hours a week, and to all two-year-olds (not just the 40% most disadvantaged).

Childcare signposting should become the responsibility of Centres, co-ordinating and blending childcare in an area to offer parents the flexible and coordinated support they need, a model developed by 4Children and currently being successfully trialled around the country¹⁴ as "Childcare Hubs".

14 4Children (2014) Community Childcare and Early Learning Hubs <http://www.4children.org.uk/Programmes/Detail/CommunityChildcareandEarlyLearningHubs>

5.6. Overhauling social care

The most significant and fundamental extension of services and support for families and children that our proposed model would deliver would be in the area of children's social care. Whilst recent years have seen improvements in outcomes for children, there are still many challenges facing social care. Ofsted still find too many examples of poor performance and too few of excellence. The government has acknowledged that services are not achieving the significant and sustained improvement required, as demonstrated by the recent announcement from the Secretary of State for Education that a new set of professional standards for all levels of the children's social work are to be developed and introduced in the coming year¹⁵.

Serious case reviews and recent reports, including Professor Eileen Munro's review of child protection¹⁶, Professor Julian Le Grand's review of Birmingham's children's services¹⁷ and Sir Martin Narey's review of social care education¹⁸, have set out some of the challenges that must be overcome to achieve this sustained improvement and reduce risks for children. Amongst the main concerns raised are that social care:

- Is often case-load led rather than need led
- Would benefit from a more family-centred holistic approach
- Is facing capacity challenges and has difficulty recruiting high quality social workers
- Should be more integrated with partner services
- Must overcome the stigma attached to it by some families and communities

Professor Le Grand found that if services are managed according to resource availability rather than need, they can only manage demand by maintaining high risk thresholds. Therefore, there are likely to be some children at risk who have not been properly identified or, if they have been, their risks have not been properly addressed.

Social care has also proved a challenging environment for innovation to take hold which has restricted change despite a strong consensus on the best ways forward. This is in direct contrast to the innovation work that Sure Start Children's Centres have, since their inception, been "agents of change" undertaking and delivering real change and improved outcomes for families in so many areas by providing support that a) wasn't there, or was not easily accessible previously; and b) delivers these services in a new way that improves outcomes. Specifically, their main approach has – from the beginning:

- Been community based
- Taken an holistic family approach
- Integrated the work of many vital partners

As a consequence, Centres have been welcomed, and become fully accepted by their community and families. Not only this but over the years they have extended their reach and approach. Whilst retaining the universal end of their business – which is the trusted and core "gateway" for families into Centres – the focus has shifted to move into working with, and providing specific support for, more vulnerable families, as well as working across the 0-19 years age range.

In our experience this work has often been led by individuals who would classify themselves as "experienced in life", with the capacity and ability to bring this experience with them to work with families and look at them as a whole, not just the specifics of a particular "problem", what would be termed – in social care terms – as a "case". Crucially these individuals have also tended to work in an integrated, not a silo-based, way.

Many really effective Sure Start Children's Centres have already de facto converted themselves into holistic, integrated family care Hubs, providing support that can turn families around, including those at the edge of care. They provide a huge range of joined-up services that all Centres deliver, including universal services such as drop-in stay and play, access to health services, and Jobcentre Plus services, but also extending to social care activities, including working with "step up" and "step down" cases⁵, and even in some instances, working at "Level 3"⁶, where staff working contribute to assessing, planning, intervening and evaluating the needs of a child or young person and parenting capacity where there are safeguarding/child protection concerns.

15 Department for Education (2014) Nicky Morgan announces children's social work reforms <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/nicky-morgan-announces-childrens-social-work-reforms>

16 Department for Education (2011) The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report. A child-centred system. Professor Eileen Munro https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175391/Munro-Review.pdf

17 Le Grand J et al. (2014) Report to the Secretary of State for Education and the Minister for Children and Families in ways forward for children's social care services in Birmingham https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/297748/Birmingham_report_25_03_14.pdf

18 Department for Education (2014) Making the education of social workers consistently effective. Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of the education of children's social workers https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/287756/Making_the_education_of_social_workers_consistently_effective.pdf

Overall these existing Centres offer what can be termed a “non-judgmental universal gateway approach”, one which is community based, and almost invariably highly respected by the community. One of the key benefits of where existing Centres have expanded their remit into these areas is that uniquely they have already begun to take the strain from overloaded social care workers in a number of ways that ultimately offers what could be called a “social work glue”.

In our approach, a Centre, and its workers, because of the trust they build with families over time therefore become an accepted gateway to receive help and support, not the challenge that direct interaction with an incoming social worker – viewed as a stranger, and therefore with suspicion – can feel like. The other advantages are that it can offer support through the 0-19 years age range; offer “step up” and “step down”⁵, and work with families as part of a team at both “level 3”⁶ and “level 4”¹⁹. Formalised, this would be rolled out nationally through the Children and Family Hubs as a new national network of Social Care Family Workers. The support being provided by the new role should be underpinned by the development of a new secondary qualification for non-graduate social work assistants. Within this a framework of quality, practice and procedures to which the Social Care Family Worker would operate would need to be developed. This would both provide recognition for work which is already being done, and also satisfy full social workers that the lower-order work being carried out is robust and is supportive of their own work. In doing so, this would provide the confidence to work together. Social Workers remain the statutory frontline resource, and the right of every child to have access to their support remains sacrosanct.

Under the model, social workers are able to focus their time to undertake the most complex cases, but with the pressure of excessive caseload, particularly of lower order cases, relieved and supported through Children and Family Hub workers. Social workers would also provide professional support and challenge to the work of Social Care Family Workers, including professional mentoring. This would allow existing expenditure on social care to be targeted much more efficiently on the frontline delivery of interventions with children and their families.

Overall, through Children and Family Hubs, the Social Care Family Worker would provide additional capacity into the social care system by creating and professionalising a new tier of the social care workforce. As a consequence the reputation of the qualified Social Worker can be enhanced by freeing them up to take and focus on more complex cases as their workload is lifted. Ultimately however the key to this approach will be that the lives of children and families are improved by enabling Social Workers and Social Care Family Workers to provide intensive, and challenging, support.

The approach is cost effective, recognising that qualified Social Workers do not need to carry out all social care work; adds capacity by enhancing the role of an existing, available workforce; and builds on the existing trusted brand, and infrastructure (both physical in terms of buildings, but primarily the dedicated staff and workforce) of Sure Start Children’s Centres. This means, as a solution to deliver improvements to the current system of support, can be implemented and rolled out rapidly and at low cost.

Finally, as an approach, it would weld Early Intervention into the social care process for the first time. This means that, as well as adding capacity to social care, it would support the early identification of problems in families, allowing preventative support (Early Intervention) rather than solving the problem once it is too late, and much more expensive to deal with.



¹⁹ “Level 4” cases are where Children are in need of protection where they are experiencing significant harm or where there is a likelihood of significant harm

5.7 Funding and timescale

Our proposal has huge potential and is very scalable because it builds on an existing infrastructure. Across the UK there are over 3,000 Children's Centres – this is a network that is in place and ready to build upon. By trialling our proposal in a number of authorities and at a number of Centres, a model can be tested ahead of roll-out nationally, and transforming both the delivery of social care as well as wider support for families and children across the whole country. There would be a two stage process to the roll-out of the proposed model over the next two Parliaments:

The next Parliament - Years 0-5 (2015-19): Establish a trial in 12-15 local authority areas in years one and two; immediately invest upfront nationally to develop the new professional qualification of the Social Care Family Worker to be in place by year three; rollout the model nationally from year three, with the transformation in the service delivery network complete by the end of the five year period, with Hubs established in every area, and with care worker(s) in place.

The second Parliament – Years 6-10 (2020-24): By the end of the decade of developing and enhancing the network of Hubs, we would expect the real culture shift to have taken place with social care truly embedded and working with early help and wider family support in every area.

Under our proposed model there would be a small one-off capital injection needed in order to develop and establish the new Social Care Family Worker qualification. However, after that, all costs would fall under existing expenditure and spending, and we would not expect this to change as we know – through the commissioning experience – what can be achieved, particularly as local authorities outsource delivery to the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. For local authorities there would also be opportunities for savings from the Hubs approach, for example allowing estate rationalisation as Centres become the single point of delivery, which would allow some resources to be reinvested into front-line delivery where it matters.

More importantly, over time, we would then expect real savings – in terms of the reducing the costs associated with dealing with the impacts of serious problems experienced by families (known to be around £9 billion in total nationally for the 500,000 most vulnerable families at the present time) as we move towards an approach where Early Intervention is at the heart of all family support, and deals with a greater proportion of problems before they escalate to the point of crisis.



6. Conclusion: A beacon for future service delivery

Current challenges for the delivery of children and family services offer the opportunity to undertake the fundamental overhaul that is needed, taking Sure Start Children's Centres – already a beacon for future service delivery in many areas – on to the next stage of their development, as expanded integrated "Hubs".

For us, the centrepiece of this work would involve – over the next five years and beyond – the transformation of Sure Start Children's Centres into extended Children and Family Hubs, which would draw together a much wider range of services for children and families across a far broader age range, and become a central focus for support within local communities. This would create the brand new infrastructure for the delivery of children and family services as radical as the creation of the network of Sure Start Children's Centres over a decade ago that this model builds upon.

Many of the building blocks of this "Hub" model are already in place, in particular the strong links already in place with local health and social care services, and the fact that in many cases they are already involved in delivery in these areas. The contraction in public finances, rather than a constraint, can be used at the opportunity – as many areas are already doing – to deliver innovative solutions to service delivery, joining-up between areas, and providing much more effective use of increasingly limited resources. We are in the middle of a time-limited and critical window – when cuts in expenditure are of a level to encourage innovation, but not of a level that would completely undermine the foundations of the network on which to build – when this could happen.

Therefore there must be no further cuts to expenditure allocated by central Government for Sure Start Children's Centres and now is the time for politicians of all parties and policy makers to show the ambition and determination necessary to give the existing network the support it needs to move forward and take the next "big leap" needed to again overhaul children and families services, and realise the potential huge benefits throughout the country that such a transformation of services and support would deliver.



Appendix A: Key background and statistics

- 500,000 families are “just coping” – dropping in and out of crisis²⁰, with complex and multiple needs. Every year £9 billion continues to be spent on managing and containing “the crisis” we allow to escalate with these families²¹
- Some estimates put the financial costs of dealing with complex family problems across the board at around £46 billion a year²², and The Early Intervention Foundation has calculated the cost of failing to tackle problems before they arise as being as high as £5,485 per young offender per month, £46,389 per child taken into care per year, and £4,528 per 18–24 year-old not in employment, education, or training (NEET) per year²³
- One in five teenagers – more than 1 million – are forecast to have poor outcomes or have troubles/problems of some form²⁴
- Almost 70,000 children in care at any one time²⁵, with nearly 660,000 referrals to child protection in the last year²⁶. Nearly two-thirds of children in England are in care because of abuse or neglect. Most don’t arrive at being in extreme need overnight.
- Every year nearly 2,500 young people are victims of sexual abuse within gangs, with a further 16,500 at risk²⁷
- A very large proportion (60%) of the children’s services budget – over £2 billion – is spent on the care system²⁸
- Children in care are four to five times more likely to have mental health problems than their peers and are more likely to end up homeless or in prison²⁹. They are also ten times more likely to be excluded from school than other children and only one per cent of care leavers go to university.
- Social care workers are overstretched. One recent survey revealed that one in six social workers have more than 40 cases on the go at any one time, and 9% say high caseloads are affecting their ability to practise good social work
- A thematic report on Ofsted’s evaluation of Serious Case Reviews (from 2007-11)³⁰ reporting on lessons learnt, said that a recurring message from these reviews was that practitioners “should have provided a more coordinated approach to the young people’s needs and they had not always recognised the important contribution of their agency in making this happen.”
- A report published by the Department for Education (2013)³¹ on learning from Serious Case Reviews (from 2009-11) reviewed the recommendations from a sample of case reviews and found that that 1 in 7 (15%, or 135 out of 932) of the recommendations related to all of the agencies involved together. This was third only after social care (179) and health (161); and that information sharing between and within agencies, was identified (from a sample of reports) as important in 95% of cases and “Ascertaining the ‘whole picture’ regarding the child/family” in 80%.

20 Riots Communities and Victims Panel (2012) After the Riots <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121003195935/http://riotspanel.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Riots-Panel-Final-Report1.pdf>

21 DCLG (2013) The Fiscal Case for Working with Troubled Families https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/79377/20130208_The_Fiscal_Case_for_Working_with_Troubled_Families.pdf

22 Relationships Alliance (2014) Cost of Family Failure Index <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/46bn-cost-of-family-failure-remains-very-high/>

23 Early Intervention Foundation (2014) Infographic http://www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/EIF_Infographic.pdf

24 4Children (2014) “Turnaround teenager” internal analysis

25 Department for Education (2014) Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2014 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359277/SFR36_2014_Text.pdf

26 Department for Education (2014) Characteristics of children in need in England, 2013-14 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2013-to-2014>

27 Children’s Commissioner (2013) Ending Gang and Youth Violence Review 2012-13 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228873/8493.pdf

28 Department for Education (2014) Planned expenditure on schools, education, children and young people’s services by local authorities: financial year 2014 to 2015 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/358165/SR35-2014_Text.pdf

29 Centre for Social Justice (2008) Children in Care Commission Report: Breakthrough Britain - Couldn’t Care Less <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/publications/couldnt-care-less>

30 Ofsted (2011) Ages of concern: learning lessons from serious case reviews. A thematic report of Ofsted’s evaluation of serious case reviews from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2011 <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ages-of-concern-learning-lessons-serious-case-reviews>

31 Department for Education (2013) New learning from serious case reviews: a two year report for 2009-11 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184053/DFE-RR226_Report.pdf

Appendix B: History of Sure Start Children's Centres

Since their establishment they have sought to change the face of children and family services. Sure Start Children's Centres have embraced a bold vision of a new service architecture for young children and their families in every disadvantaged area, something that remains a priority today. Over £10 billion has been invested to establish more than 3,500 Sure Start Children's Centres since 1999 to create this new public service. This "next phase development" in our welfare state aimed to pioneer a new approach to delivering support to local children and families, bringing together health, education, family support and specialist support.

Children's Centres originated as Sure Start Local Programmes, an initiative announced as part of the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review. Between 1999 and 2004, 524 Sure Start Local Programmes were set up in selected areas in the 20% most deprived wards in England. A national roll-out of Sure Start Children's Centres then followed between 2004 and 2010, which proceeded in three phases. Phase 1 extended full coverage to the 20% most deprived wards; under Phase 2 there was a further extension to ensure full coverage across the 30% most disadvantaged areas; finally, Phase 3 extended complete coverage to the remaining 70% of areas. The core purpose of Centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on those in greatest need. They work to make sure all children are properly prepared for school, regardless of background or family circumstances. They also offer support to parents.

Sure Start Children's Centres, along with wider children and family services, have experienced significant reorganisation over recent years as local areas have sought to respond to pressure of reduced budgets. For some, this has been an opportunity to realign and co-ordinate their support for children and families in a more effective way, but for many the effect has been less positive with a recognised reduction of services in many areas as the emphasis on statutory services grows.

Yet, after almost a decade of investment, and despite intense pressure on Centres' budgets in recent years, the Sure Start Children's Centre network has "come of age" and around 3,300 Centres remain. Centres are reaching more families than ever before, over one million at last count, and have become a resource that is highly valued by their local communities, providing a valuable springboard for future development in the most disadvantaged communities.

Notwithstanding the strength of Sure Start Children's Centres, however we cannot ignore the pressure and strain that the service has come under in recent years, in large part linked to reduced budget(s), with the removal of a ring-fenced grant for Sure Start Children's Centres and its replacement by the broader "Early Intervention Grant".

Appendix C: The current picture for Sure Start Children's Centres

We are at a critical juncture for Sure Start Children's Centres with significant pressures upon, and reductions to, budgets in many areas of the country. There is understandably some doubt over the level of services that will be operating in 2015. Research by 4Children reviewing recent and current plans and consultations on Sure Start Children's Centre service provision across local authorities has found that many sites across the country are proposed for closure, merger, or reductions in the level of service on offer³.

Overall, we are in the middle of a period of rapid and ongoing reform, change, and some uncertainty over the future shape of the network. Our analysis of the Department for Education's data has found that, when compared to the level of spending in 2011/12, there has been an overall cut in spending on Sure Start Children's Centres and Early Years services of 20% over the three years from 2012/13 to 2014/15. The £3.36 billion spent over the last three years is around £830m less than it otherwise would have been. This Census has found that over the coming year, cuts in budget will be the single biggest challenge for nearly two-thirds of the network.

The response to these budget changes has been dramatic: some local authorities have merged Centres, others have limited the services available and a smaller but significant number have closed Centres. We know that whereas many of those local authorities who responded quickly used the "blunt instrument" of straightforward reduction in number of Centres, more recent responses have been more creative: outsourcing the provision to providers, including the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE), and also changing the structure of delivery in their commissioning.

Our own research³ has found that more than half of Centres expect to see changes to their management structure over the coming year. Almost half of those Centres operating as single (standalone) sites at the present time are set to move to become part of a managed cluster of Centres, and even just under one-quarter of Centres already in a cluster, expect the number of sites and area their cluster covers to expand. More worrying, from the responses, we estimate that around 112 sites are set to close over the coming year. Research carried out by 4Children reviewing local authority consultations suggests that this could even be an underestimate, with over 200 Centre sites – one-third of the current network under review – potentially at risk of closure.

Yet, Sure Start Children's Centres have "come of age", cementing their position as a trusted and valued community asset. Nationally, Centres are supporting two-thirds of the half million most vulnerable families. Where they work at their best they are successful in identifying disadvantaged children and families and providing specific support where they need it, moving decisively towards multi-agency

working bringing together health, education, family support and specialist support. Lessons learnt from these successful Sure Start Children's Centres offer a beacon for how services can be delivered as an accepted and highly trusted asset for the support of children and their families.

There are many positive signs. A large number of Centres are already providing preventative and targeted work with partners to support families in crisis on domestic abuse, alcohol and substance abuse, mental health support, child protection and the Troubled Families Programme. Engagement with partners is growing, with around one-quarter expecting this to increase over the coming year, and expecting to decrease in only a handful of cases. The main areas where partnership working is expected to increase are around targeted services linked to vulnerable families and children, including with workers in health services, social care, and local delivery of the Troubled Families programme. Targeted support on domestic violence and child protection are also increasing.

A growing number of authorities (we estimate 30 – 40%) now developing Sure Start Children's Centres as part of a wider integrated, Early Intervention, universal and targeted support approach across the age range of children, with many more are working towards this. More Centres are being commissioned by local authorities to external providers. 4Children, Action for Children and Barnardo's are the largest providers running a total of approximately 500. Yet, with most Centres still delivered by local authorities, there is considerable potential for further outsourcing and commissioning of Children's Centre services. Overall there is also a definitive shift taking place, away from single-site providers towards "clustering" of Centres' management; and from universal to targeted services, increasingly in partnership with other service providers. These shifts mirror the approach, a tried and tested model already working in a number of areas of the country, proposed by 4Children with Children's Centres extended into Children and Family Hubs.

