

# #SortItOut: Family Hubs and Universal Family Support

- The #SortItOut Campaign, which is supported by an alliance of family and relationship support organisations, was launched in winter 2020 by the APPG for Supporting Couple Relationships and Reducing Parental Conflict to call for greater government investment in reducing parental conflict and improving family support through Family Hubs.
- This briefing note builds on the Government's manifesto to "champion"<sup>1</sup> Family Hubs and provides an outline vision for that manifesto commitment.
- In Budget 2020, the Government announced £2.5 million for research into Family Hubs. In December 2020, the Children's Minister announced the creation of a National Centre for Family Hubs and Integrated Services to provide guidance to Local Authorities (LAs).

## 1. Universal Family Support – a radical vision for supporting families:

- Family Hubs build on a wider, long-term vision for a universal family support service where mothers, fathers and families can access the early help and support they need to build stronger families. Families have been described as the 'best welfare system there is.'<sup>2</sup> This is because stronger families improve outcomes for children and reduce the likelihood of social problems, requiring a state intervention from happening in the future.<sup>3</sup>
- A universal family support service would mirror the provision in health and education where we have built universal provision over the last 100 years. It is no longer remarkable for a child to go to school or for the unwell to receive medical treatment funded by the taxpayer. Universal family support builds on this progress.
- To reflect the long-term vision of a universal family support service, family hubs need to be seen as a resource for all family types and from every demographic. Recent research has shown that 'high earners' are 3.5 times more likely than the national average to experience relationship distress.<sup>4</sup>
- There should be a long-term ambition for Family Hubs to be as inclusive as possible and be accessed by all families in a local area and not just families on low income or in need of support from interventions such as the Troubled Families Programme.



## 2. What are Family Hubs?

- Family and Relationship Hubs provide a single 'early help front door' for families with children aged 0 – 19. Family Hubs should be accessible to all local families. The 1989 Children Act required Local Authorities to establish 'family centres':  
*"Family centre" means a centre at which any of the persons mentioned in sub-paragraph (3) may – (a) attend for occupational, social, cultural or recreational activities; (b) attend for advice, guidance or counselling; or (c) be provided with accommodation while he is receiving advice, guidance or counselling.*<sup>5</sup>

- In 2014, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) outlined the purpose of a Family Hub in their 'Fully Committed' report:<sup>6</sup>  
*"The purpose of Family Hubs is to co-locate and coordinate all family services available within a community and provide a visible and welcoming access point for any parent (mothers and fathers) to appropriate support, services and information about family-related matters."*
- There are an estimated 150 'family hubs' across the UK.<sup>7</sup> There are no agreed outcome standards for these hubs which makes defining a 'family hub' difficult.
- The new National Centre for Family Hubs and Integrated Services should establish an agreed national framework for the provision of services within family hubs (see section on 'Principles' below). This should not prevent family hubs from responding to local needs and reflecting the communities they serve through local design of provision based on a nationally agreed framework of standards.
- 'Early Years' and 'Early Help' Family Hubs are not restricted to early years support for new mothers and fathers. Successful hubs should provide 'early help' for families of all ages and types alongside early years provision for children in the first 1,000 days.
- Family Hubs are often referred to as 'Early Help' front doors. This highlights the important role they play in preventing families' difficulties becoming entrenched and possibly escalating to the point where they require the involvement of statutory social services.
- Family Hubs seek to offer a spectrum of support for children from birth to adolescence and for couples, from creating a family to support when relationships break down – and when mothers and fathers are parenting across households.

## Principles underpinning Family Hubs

The Family Hubs Network has set out nine principles which should characterise Family Hubs and the systems they are part of. The #SortItOut campaign endorses these principles and would like to see the Department for Education formally adopt them. The principles are:

1. An understanding of the importance of Early Help and prevention.
2. Families with children aged 0-19 (and up to 25 for SEND) have somewhere they know they can go if they need information, advice or guidance for family, relationship and other issues.
3. Superb provision for children's early years (0-5) so their families get whatever help they need to give them the best start in life and ensure they are school-ready.
4. Integrated health and public health priorities, such as health visiting and maternity, with social services and Troubled Families programmes.
5. A central access point to services and support, connected to all other delivery sites in the area.
6. A relational culture embodied by everyone who works in the Hub.
7. A whole-family approach which focuses on disadvantaged and vulnerable children.
8. Parents can access relationship support when there is conflict, to support and rebuild an existing relationship or during and after separation.
9. The voluntary sector and wider community make an extensive and vital contribution.<sup>1</sup>

As part of point 2, we would expect Family Hubs to provide: support and advice with money worries, where financial problems are a leading cause of separation.

## Co-location:

- Family Hubs should not be rebranded Children's Centres. They extend the remit of Children's Centres to focus on families, not just children, throughout childhood into adolescence.
- **Hubs and Spokes:** Family Hubs use a 'hub and spokes' model:
  - Hub:** Hubs are the 'go to' place for any mother or father to access services or information about all family-related matters including birth registration, antenatal and postnatal services, information on childcare, employment and debt advice, substance misuse services, relationship and parenting support, local activities for families, and support for family separating.
  - Spokes:** Spokes provided by volunteers through the local voluntary and community sector (VCS), faith and parent groups can reach families in communities that do not tend to come through the doors of mainstream Children's Centres.
- Family Hubs could be integrated within GP and primary health services. Relationship Matters research identified that 43% of people discuss relationship issues with their GP.<sup>8</sup>

## Separation and post separation support:

- In 2017/18, there were approximately 2.4 million separated families in Great Britain including 3.5 million children.<sup>9</sup> It is estimated that about 40% of all separating parents bring issues about their children's care to the Family Court for determination.<sup>10</sup>
- The Australian Family Relationship Centres provide support and guidance to couples on separation. There should be an ambition for Family Hubs to provide a high-quality level of support for couples seeking to separate that reduces the need for legal interventions.
- Hubs should provide good quality 'triage' for couples facing difficulties and seeking to separate. A recent report from the Family Solutions Group, established by President of the Family Division, Sir Andrew McFarlane, provided a detailed outline of what good quality 'triage' services would look like.<sup>11</sup> This report set out how Family Hubs could be used as a local source of information and to signpost appropriately to reliable providers of services in the area for separating and separated families.
- Providing good separation and post separation support should be a long-term ambition for a successful Family Hubs model. This should recognise the particular needs of families going through this process and the support they will require to 'separate well' and to maintain positive co-parenting relationships in the years that follow. The work of the Family Solutions Group has provided a significant amount of evidence on 'what good looks like' and the needs of separating and separated families. Managing separation and post-separation parenting well would help the government to improve the number of separated families with informal child support arrangements in place.



In addition to the benefits that the provision of such services can bring to children as a result of reducing the acrimony between separated parents, these relationship support services have the potential to facilitate and increase child maintenance payments - since refusal or reluctance to provide child maintenance is very often a relational problem as much as a financial one.

### 3. A National Online Family Hub:

- In 2017 The Manifesto for Strengthening Families, a grouping of MPs and peers supporting new family policies, also recommended the development of a virtual Family Hub “offering online support and guidance that mirrors the depth of quality of NHS.gov and links families to local provision”. A digital Family Hub could also assist schools with supporting children with mental health concerns.
- This online offering could use ‘geo-location’ technology, often used within apps, to link families to local support to ensure that the online connects directly to physical support.
- There is an increasingly active market in online relationships and family support and an online Family Hub could provide quality assured gateway to this support for families. As professionals increasingly move to virtual meetings, the provision of one-to-one meetings could be facilitated through an online Family Hub to increase the reach of professionals offering family support.
- The national online Family Hub will help normalise families accessing emotional support and extend the Family Hub’s reach beyond the physical building. It will enable families to still access support and be involved in the Family Hub even when it is going well.

### 4. Reducing Parental Conflict Programme:

- Research commissioned by the DWP suggests that family conflict and separation may have a direct impact on childhood outcomes in both educational attainment and future employment.
- The DWP launched the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) programme in 2017 with up to £39 million over four years to fund projects delivered by local authorities. Of the 148 top tier local authorities in England, 145 have accessed strategic leadership grants to assess their ability to deliver RPC programmes and embed the work within existing services.<sup>12</sup>
- *The #SortItOut campaign welcomes continued funding of the RPC programme and wants to see an expanded programme delivered alongside the roll out of Family Hubs.*

### 5. What we are calling for:

#### Launch a Family Support Transformation Fund:

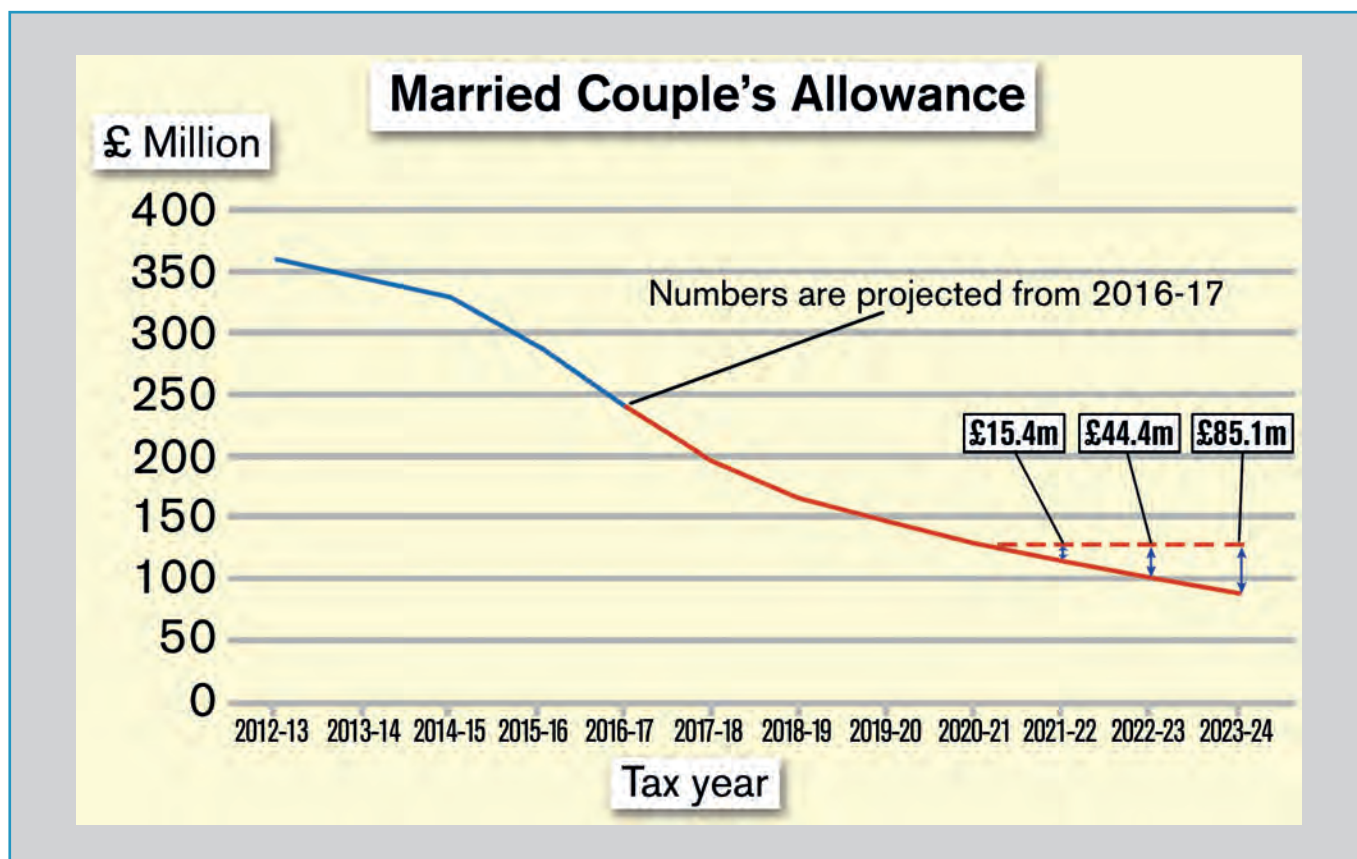
- The Chancellor should establish a Family Support Transformation Fund. This fund would provide a resource for top tier LAs to implement a Family Hubs model across their area.
- LAs would use money from the fund to develop an implementation plan to either develop a localised Family Hub network or extend existing provisions of Family Hubs. The Family Hubs will be commissioned by LAs but will be run independently.
- The Family Support Transformation Fund would build on the announcements made in last year’s Spring Budget and provide the resources for a nationwide roll-out of Family Hubs delivered nationally. The Fund would work alongside the National Centre for Family Hubs and Integrated Services, with evaluation carried out using research funds announced in Budget 2020.
- The ambition of the fund should be to see every LA in England move towards delivery of Family Hubs, with a plan to ensure every family has or will have access to a Family Hub by the close of the fund.



*The fund would include:*

- Money for staffing resource to enable nominated LA officials to step back and do the authority-wide 're-engineering'
- The development of missing services, particularly relationship support and post-separation support, as these are still not found in many Hubs
- Working alongside the National Centre for Family Hubs and Integrated Services to understand 'what works' and embed good practice within their Family Hubs offering.
- Capital funding to re-purpose existing infrastructure, such as Children's Centres, so it is appropriate for parents with older children and teenagers themselves.
- This money can be found through the declining uptake of the Married Couples Allowance (MCA) and would incur no new expenditure or loss of benefits to existing claimants.
- Due to the age-limited nature of MCA<sup>13</sup>, government expenditure on this tax relief is declining rapidly and is likely to disappear altogether within the next decade. Using the cost of the reliefs from the last five years, we have projected the likely costs over the next three years and calculated the amount saved as these costs decrease.

*Married Couple's Allowance cost to HM Treasury:*



- Money for the proposed fund could be found by maintaining expenditure on the MCA at 2019/20 levels (estimated at £127.18 million) for a three-year cycle of funding, re-allocating the difference between this level and the amount claimed over this period. The above chart projects a decreasing drawdown on the budget for the MCA over a three-year period. Based on this calculation, it is anticipated that this fund would provide £15.4 million in Year 1, £59.8 million in Year 2, and £160.3 million in Year 3.

## Commission a 'quick-fire' review of commissioning:

- In the long term the Government will need to develop a funding stream for family support to ensure the provision of services within Family Hubs. This is the 'train and tracks' approach where family hubs are the 'tracks' and the funding of localised provision represents the 'train'.
- The #SortItOut campaign would like to see the Government fund services which seek to address parental conflict be included in each local authority's approach.
- Relationship distress touchpoints could be identified to target the early provision of support. The new National Centre for Family Hubs should conduct research into the likely touch points for family and relationship support services. These could include:
  - Birth registration
  - Marriage/Civil Partnership registration
  - Registration for certain benefits (child, housing, Universal Credit)
  - Working with CAP and other debt services, where debt and financial stress are a major driver of relationship breakdown
  - Council Tax, Income Tax Returns and other touch points with wide reach across the population but are not associated with relationship breakdown
- The Government should conduct a 'quick fire' review of all commissioned services which could be delivered within a national network of Family Hubs, including public health and family support. Commissioning should take into account Family Hubs and require commissioning decisions to evidence how they are working with Family Hubs to provide services. This review would establish a long-term funding model for Family Hubs.

- 1 The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019, [accessed via: [https://assets.global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba\\_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf](https://assets.global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf)]
- 2 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/7646660.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7646660.stm)
- 3 Centre for Social Justice, 'Why Family Matters' (2018)
- 4 <https://the4habits.com/relationship-breakdown-and-the-workplace/>
- 5 Children Act 1989 [accessed via: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/schedule/2/part/1/crossheading/family-centres/enacted>]
- 6 [https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CSJJ2072\\_Family\\_Breakdown.pdf](https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CSJJ2072_Family_Breakdown.pdf) p47
- 7 Family Hubs Network, [accessed via: <https://familyhubsnetwork.com/>]
- 8 Relationships Matter: Understanding the Needs of Adults (Particularly Parents) Regarding Relationship Support, p. 76
- 9 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/separated-families-population-statistics-april-2014-to-march-2018/estimates-of-the-separated-family-population-statistics-april-2014-to-march-2018>
- 10 <https://www.judiciary.uk/publications/what-about-me-reframing-support-for-families-following-parental-separation/>
- 11 [https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/FamilySolutionsGroupReport\\_WhatAboutMe\\_12November2020-2.pdf-final-2.pdf](https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/FamilySolutionsGroupReport_WhatAboutMe_12November2020-2.pdf-final-2.pdf).
- 12 Centre for Social Justice, Fully Committed? p.51 [accessed via: <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CSJJ8330-Covid-19-Recovery-report-201116-WEB.final.pdf>]
- 13 Married Couple's Allowance [accessed via: [www.gov.uk/married-couples-allowance](http://www.gov.uk/married-couples-allowance)]