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# **Implementing Family Hubs**

## **Transcript – Address on Best Start for Life from Dame Andrea Leadsom MP**

Speakers:

- Dame Andrea Leadsom MP, Chair of the Early Years Healthy Development Review

### **Camilla Rosan - 00:00:01**

Andrea, a huge welcome. It's my pleasure to introduce Dame Andrea Leadsom, who's been very, very busy today and we're so lucky she's squeezed us in. She really needs no introduction, but I'll do my best.

Lots of you will know that she's been the Conservative MP for South Northamptonshire since 2010, and prior to that, she had a very illustrious career in banking and finance. She's had a very diverse range of hugely important roles in government throughout her career.

But I think one of the golden threads has been in relation to her campaigning for our youngest children and championing better support for families to make sure that every baby gets the best start in life has been her passion for more than 20 years. And this started from chairing the Oxford Parent Infant Project from the late 1990s and founding the national charity PIPUK in 2012, which is a charity very personally close to my heart.

And she established the All-Party Parliamentary Group from conception to age two and the 1001 Critical Days manifesto. She's currently, as I'm sure you will know, the Government's Early Years Healthy Development advisor and chairs the Start for Life unit. And this year, a crown in her illustrious career, with being awarded a DBE for her services to politics. We are so, so pleased that Dame Leadsom could join us today to tell us about her early years review and Best Start for Life policies.

Over to you, Andrea.

## **Dame Andrea Leadsom - 00:01:35**

- Thanks so much, Camilla. It's been a pleasure to work with you over many years and many different subjects, but in particular, it's fantastic to be taking part today in this Family Hubs launch, and to tell you a bit about the Early Years Healthy Development Review.

So just to kick off. We launched this review in July 2020. The Prime Minister asked me if I would chair it. I was delighted to do so. And then we published our vision for the 1001 critical days in March 2021. So just earlier this year, and in the vision for the thousand and one days, there are six action areas that we are now embroiled in implementing. The first three action areas are about what families will see that's different and will really help support them better.

And the second three are about how to make the system itself work better. So, action area number one is seamless support for every family. It's essentially about every local authority area, providing a set of Start for Life, universal services and a set of Start for Life Universal Plus services.

So, the universal services are midwifery, health visiting, mental health support, breastfeeding support, and the statutory services of safeguarding and SEND. Universal Plus is whatever that local area needs to prioritise. Whether it's smoking cessation, debt advice, couple counselling, whether it's issues around domestic violence or substance misuse, all of the Universal Plus services that so many local areas provide so well to families.

What those families need to know is how they can access those services and what they might need, when they need it and where they can access it, so, action area number one is providing that seamless support.

And then action area number two is what we're talking about here today, and that is the absolute key to all of our early years work. And that is a welcoming hub for every family to go to, so, the Family Hubs.

And I was so delighted in the spending review that we were awarded some money to be able to transform Family Hubs in different local areas. The third action area is information that families need when they need it. Now what families said to us in the first phases, "I've had to tell my story six times this

week alone." "Why don't you ever talk to each other?" And what early years professionals and volunteers say to us is, "if only we'd known more about what this family had gone through, we could have been able to hit the ground running more quickly."

And sadly, we know that when there's a very serious case, very often the sort of the learning from the back of it is this team didn't talk to that team. These people didn't know what had been going on over there and so on. So actually information, joined up information. And so, our ambition is to see a digital version of the red book for every new baby.

So that their early developmental goals can be recorded by their family and that Early years professionals can join up and share data in support of families. And then, the second three action points, as I say, are really around making the system work better.

So, action area four is an empowered workforce. We all know health visitors do the most brilliant job for families in the very early days. But at the same time, they have very high caseloads and very often they're not able even to meet the statutory requirement of five visits for every baby. They also spend an awful lot of time on referring and trying to get extra support for particular families with mental health problems, with breastfeeding problems, with other concerns about disabilities, and so on.

And so actually looking at cross-training, but also routes into the workforce and also the concept of a key contact so that we can actually see whether the workforce can be empowered and also added to with other skills working as part of a team. And then action area number five is about outcomes.

We only really care about what we measure. And so, outcomes looking at a parent and carer panel in every local area so that parents and carers and particularly those seldom heard voices, can provide feedback to their local area on what services went well, what wasn't so good for them. So that kind of qualitative feedback is very, very important. So, too, is the more quantitative feedback.

So, looking at ways of using the ages and stages questionnaire better and potentially looking at an inspection, a light touch inspection, of the whole Start for Life offer, of whether it's working well, whether it's joined up, whether the parents are accessing it and so on. That's the outcomes action area. And then finally, but so critically, is leadership. So, the Prime Minister has agreed that he

will appoint a member of the cabinet with oversight for the Start for Life. And at the same time, what we hope to see is in every local area, a local leader who will be responsible for Start for Life in their area.

Now that could be the director of children's services. It could be the chairman of the new Integrated Care Network, once that's established. It could be the chairman of the Health and Wellbeing Board. It will be for local areas to decide exactly who that should be. But we do want to see much more local accountable leadership for the Start for Life that's really important.

So, the great news is, as Camilla alluded to, we had some funding from the government in the spending review last week. And what's been brilliant for me is to see that both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, as well as the Secretaries of State for health, local government and very importantly, for education, and children and families.

All of those ministers are entirely backing the importance of every baby getting the best start for life. And so, what we've had is, as you will all know, £82 million for Family Hubs to transform the early years services in 75 upper tier local authority areas.

We have a £50 million allocation for parenting programmes. So often, as you will know, families are desperate to be good parents, but they simply don't know what they are supposed to do. Babies don't come with an instruction manual. Should I pick him up every time he cries? Should I feed her on demand or not? What do I do if I'm worried about my partner's mental health or my own mental health and so on.

So, parenting programmes are very important. Ten million pounds for the Start for Life offer, to enable local authorities to actually publish what is it that you might need, and where can you access it in those critical early days? Fifty million pounds for breastfeeding support so that families, so many of whom want to breastfeed their baby. But as we know in England, breastfeeding rates are some of the lowest in Western Europe, and certainly the continuation of breastfeeding up to the sort of gold standard of six months happens in very, very few cases. In fact, I think it's under 2% of cases, where babies are still exclusively breastfed at six months.

And often, what parents have told us is that's because they felt they didn't have the help and support. So breastfeeding support is absolutely critical. One hundred million pounds for infants and perinatal mental health because ultimately happy parents and carers will be in such a stronger position to

provide the loving attention that their baby needs for his or her emotional development. And for that critical period of early brain development when their lifelong blocks of emotional and physical well-being are laid down. And that's in the period from conception to the age of two.

So, supporting parents with their mental health needs is absolutely critical. Up to one-in-five women, and up to one-in-ten dads suffer from postnatal depression, and so, tackling that is really critical. And then the £10 million for workforce pilots to look at, as I say, this concept of improving the capacity of health visitors through a mixed skill workforce.

And also improving the cross-training to give parents and particularly their babies every opportunity in that critical early period. And then the final piece of spending review, great news, is a £200 million uplift to the Supporting Families programme.

So that is, of course, for all families in difficulty. But it will have a focus on the critical thousand and one days, the period from conception to the age of two. Helping those families with particular needs to make a better, a better, happier start for their babies.

So, what next for Family Hubs? Well, this is my ambition, and all of these things are yet to be finally decided. But since we're here launching the Family Hubs' first stage of competition, I thought I would share with you what I would really love to see from the Family Hubs.

So first of all, I think a hub and spoke model. The Family Hub would be the big, universally available open long hours, welcoming hub with multi-disciplinary services taking place within its walls, and the spoke will be the outreach.

Now, whether that's a mobile Family Hub coming to a village near you, or whether it's a once-a-week parenting group in a village hall, in a particular rural area or in a hard to access area.

So that hub and spoke model, the big Family Hub and the spokes out in more local areas and remote access, catch ups and online. What we so learnt in the Covid pandemic was that families really valued the remote, the catch up and

the online services that they were receiving. So first of all, remote. Specifically, a lot of mums said, I would rather get my breastfeeding support through a remote call rather than physically in the room, which can be a little bit embarrassing.

So, that actually could be a preference for people to have those meetings remotely. Secondly, for the dads. Many of them told us that actually, if they're talking about their own mental health, they would rather do that remotely than physically in the room. That would feel more comfortable. So, two areas where potentially virtual services could be the answer. Catch ups absolutely vital.

As we know, if you've got a tiny baby and a toddler and you haven't had a shower yet, then getting down to the nearest Family Hub for the parenting class, you will miss it. So being able to watch something on catch up that was perhaps a parenting class or some breastfeeding support or whatever it might be.

And then, of course, online. So, two o'clock in the morning, when you're desperate because your baby won't sleep or is hungry and you can't latch on those sorts of things, so online. Then, universal services physically and virtually available through the Family Hub. Each hub, Midwifery health, visiting mental health support, breastfeeding support available physically and virtually, and Universal Plus services could also be made available through Family Hubs, whether it's smoking cessation, couple counselling, debt advice or even language lessons for those who don't speak English as a first language

And then the Family Hubs joining up the service is so important. So done via parent and carer panels taking place in the Family Hub, so that those who have a story to tell whether it's same sex parents, whether it's foster carers, whether it's kinship carers and of course, your traditional mum and dad or your single mum, who really want their voice to be heard and their views to be taken into account so that the service can be improved for all parents and carers.

The digital version of the red book that will really improve information sharing and the ability to improve services and the concept of a key contact, that will be a real way to improve what's available to all families.

Data. Family Hubs should be in a position, in my view, to record data, new birth data, breastfeeding initiation, continuation, mental health issues and then the ages and stages questionnaire, the two-year assessments. Ideally, Family Hubs can start to really record that data accurately.

Family Hubs, I would like to see open for long hours, not just a few hours a week, but all day, six days a week. Universal access, non-stigmatising, to have your antenatal sign on in a Family Hub, to register your baby's birth in a Family Hub, and to have your antenatal parenting classes, all in the Family Hub. Get the dads in, get the other partner in. Make it a really welcoming place so that everybody goes there.

So, it's as normal to go to a Family Hub as it is to go to the GP or indeed to the local library. And then, of course, Family Hubs will be offering services right from conception through to age 19 or even 25, and say that will need to be thought through carefully because there is the opportunity for the Sure Start to be brought in to that Family Hub concept where that works.

Sure Start, I'm a big fan of. There are still 3000 of them in England and actually rationalising so that services for the early years are available in Family Hubs that focus on the early years, but there may well be others that focus on older children.

And so that's a bit of a run through of my ambitions. I'm not yet government policy. I have the beauty of being the Chair of this review, but also a backbencher, so I can argue.

But what I want to see, and I'm really keen to hear your thoughts. But I thought I would just finish off with a lovely quote from Penny Leach, who is a great advocate for the early years and a fantastic academic.

She describes it as, "loving a baby is a circular business, a kind of feedback loop, the more you give, the more you get and the more you get, the more you feel like giving." And isn't that true? And if Family Hubs can be a part of that journey for every family, then we can rest assured we will transform our society for the better.

Thank you very much.

**Camilla Rosan - 00:16:40**

- Thank you, Andrea. What a wonderful way to end the very compelling presentation you gave.