

Home-Start Epsom, Ewell and Banstead

Managing Referrals and Waiting Periods Policy and Procedure

Policy Statement

Home-Start is committed to providing a safe, efficient and responsive service to local families with young children. Referrals are accepted with the consent of the family. The range of referrals or self-referrals accepted is not limited, except where the resources available are not adequate to meet the number or complexity of cases or where ring fenced funding is secured to deliver support packages to families with specific support needs. Waiting times are carefully managed and referrers and families are kept informed.

Purpose of Policy and Procedure

For funders: As one element of demonstrating an efficient, responsive and reliable service to families, Home-Start will operate to clearly documented referral procedures that can be shared with existing and potential funders and potential partners in joint delivery of services.

For referrers: to ensure good safeguarding practice we will ensure that referrers are absolutely clear about the nature, timing and level of Home-Start's support to families they refer and that they do not mistake occasional support offered to families waiting to be matched with the full Home-Start support service. Clearly documented referral procedures are shared with referrers and they are kept informed at all stages of the support to families including when support ends.

For families: Home-Start's commitment to good matching remains an essential feature of our service. If a suitable volunteer cannot be identified within the period noted within the following procedure, either due to the schemes capacity or the needs of the family, the referral should be returned to the referrer. Referrers and funders should be made aware that this is an important part of Home-Start's commitment to ensuring excellent and safe practice in family support.

Continued Best Practice development: In order to comply with the HSUK Quality Assurance System Home-Start will have and operate to clearly documented referral procedures.

Referral procedure: see Appendix A

Signature of Chair:



Name: BRIONY THOMAS

Date policy and Procedure adopted: 12.02.2025

Date policy to be reviewed next: 12.02.2027

APPENDIX A: REFERRAL PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA

HSEEB provide a number of family support services:

- HSEEB Volunteer Home-Visiting Service (or 1:1 Staff Support)
- Over 5's/SEND and Parent Support Service
- Perinatal Mental Health Service (including The Nest Nurture Groups and Drop-In Groups)
- Dad Matters Service

Home-Start Volunteer Home-Visiting Service

The Volunteer Home-Visiting Service acts to recruit and train volunteers – who are usually parents themselves – to visit families at home who have at least one child under 5 to offer informal, friendly and confidential support. Volunteers offer emotional and practical support which is tailored to the family. Needs can vary from week to week so our support is flexible and responsive.

The criteria for HSEEB Volunteer Home Visiting support are:

- The family has a child under 5 years of age
- They live in (and pay council tax within) the Borough of Epsom and Ewell, Banstead wards north of the M25, or Mole Valley wards including Ashted, Leatherhead, Fetcham, Bookham (wards) as shown on this map <https://hseeb.org/wp-content/uploads/Surrey-Home-Starts-Map.jpg>
- The family has a need and would benefit from weekly volunteer support
- The family has given consent for referral (if referred by outside agency)

There are many reasons why parents need support and these can include:

- Isolation and loneliness
- Anxiety or Depression (including postnatal depression)
- Coping with Child's or Parent's illness or disability
- Death of a family member
- Emotional and practical demands of twins, triplets or multiple children under 5
- Relationship difficulties
- Financial difficulties
- Exhaustion

Over 5s/SEND and Parenting Support Service

The aim of this project is to offer support to families of children living in our area, with at least one child under 11 years of age who are finding life as a parent particularly difficult for any number of reasons.

To access this support, families may have:

- At least one child under 11 years of age who has Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), with or without a SEND/ADHD/ASD diagnosis
- Child/ren with emotional/behavioural challenges
- Parents who would benefit from accessing support

Support on offer may include:

- Drop-in Advice Cafés in local schools or community venues, providing a chance to chat to other parents and a Home-Start coordinator
- 1 to 1 parenting support and advice
- Family Links Parenting Courses
- Parenting/SEND Workshops
- Help to find appropriate support within the community

Perinatal Support Service

Designed to support parents during pregnancy and the first year following the birth of a child/ren (perinatal period) with mild to moderate mental health concerns or those experiencing relational issues with their babies.

To access this support families may have:

- mild to moderate mental health issues
- be experiencing relational issues with their babies
- be pregnant or have a child up to 1 year

Support on offer may include:

- Drop-in Perinatal Mental Health Groups
- The Nest Nurture Groups (8-week structured groups)
- 1 to 1 parenting support and advice
- Help to find appropriate support within the community

REFERRAL PROCESS FOR ALL PROJECTS

There are two routes for referral for support:

- Referral by a professional working with the family
- Self-referral

Referral by a professional

1. We operate a 'TRIAGE' process for all referrals. In the first instance, referrers will contact Hayley Ronald, Family Support Lead, at Hayley.ronald@hseeb.org.uk or 07804 519622 to discuss the suitability of Home-Start support for the family and their needs.
2. If HSEEB agrees the appropriateness of referral and explains support available or declines referral
3. Family Support Lead will email a link to the referrer to complete online
4. Professional gains consent for referral from the family and completes the HSEEB referral form in as much detail as possible
5. Once the referral form is submitted, the Family Support Lead is alerted automatically, and the referral is allocated to a member of the staff team. If the referral is for the Home-Visiting Service, the allocated Coordinator will complete the following steps. If the referral is for the Perinatal or Over 5s/SEND Services, the Lead for that service will complete the following steps:
6. Within 2 weeks of receiving the referral, HSEEB staff will contact the family to discuss the referral and to arrange an Initial Visit by a member of staff. Referrer is notified that the referral has been received.
7. At the Initial Visit, staff discuss with the family their needs and agree outcomes and timeframes. This will take place within 4 weeks (as far as possible) of receipt of the referral. The referrer will be informed of any decision to support the family by HSEEB.
8. If, following the Initial Visit, staff discuss the family's needs and decide the family is suitable for receiving support, the family is placed on the waiting list to be matched with a volunteer or to receive other support. At this point the family is NOT receiving Home Visiting support, but staff will remain in contact with the family. The referrer will be kept informed of any decisions made.
9. For the Volunteer Home-Visiting Service, when a suitable volunteer is found, a Matching Visit will be arranged with the family by HSEEB staff who will accompany the volunteer to the family on this visit. For Over 5s/SEND Services, the family will be alerted when service capacity allows for support to begin. Support, outcomes and timeframes will be confirmed.
10. For the Matching Visit (if applicable) HSEEB will obtain feedback from the family and the volunteer to ensure a good match. In the majority of cases, this matching will be successful, and the volunteer will continue to visit the family as agreed.

11. The referrer will receive confirmation that support has begun. We aim this to be within 8 weeks from receiving the referral form.
12. After the first Volunteer lone visit to the family (if applicable), HSEEB staff will obtain feedback from the family and Volunteer.
13. There will be 6-weekly reviews with Families and Volunteers, and the referrer will be updated.
14. During one of these reviews, ending will be planned for and a final 'ending visit' by HSEEB staff will take place with the family. Confirmation of ending will be sent to the family, volunteer and referrer.

If the Family Support Lead feels the referral is inappropriate, they may decline the referral, either verbally at the stage of initial conversation, or at any point if the service cannot provide appropriate support. The referrer will be made aware of this decision and an explanation will be provided.

Families Waiting

The requirements of some families mean that they may be harder to match than others (e.g. because of their location, the time at which they wish their volunteer to visit or because HSEEB believes their circumstances are particularly challenging); in which case HSEEB will make an honest assessment of the likelihood of providing support and communicate that to the family and the referrer – rather than holding the family on a waiting or matching list for many months.

Home-Start's unique service involving the careful matching of a volunteer with a family means that there is almost always a 'wait' between referral and introducing the volunteer. HSEEB aim to offer the Volunteer Home visiting service within 8 weeks from the date of receiving the referral. Staff keep in contact with families during this time and offer support as appropriate. However, there may be times when the capacity of the scheme means there is no likelihood of being able to offer a service within the timeframe or where the resources available to Home-Start are not adequate to meet the complexity of the family's needs. In this instance the referrer will be informed and a way forward agreed.

Families who have been waiting for a match for more than the period stated in the procedure (8 weeks) are either reviewed by the Family Support Lead again to assess whether their support needs have altered and whether they should be referred on, or the referral is brought back to the original referrer for discussion and next steps are agreed with him/her.

A proactive approach is taken with all waiting families at this point, involving a review of the referral and a clearly identified course of action. As a result, HSEEB, the family and the referrer are all aware whether:

- the referral is 'returned' to the original referrer, so that s/he might refer the family elsewhere for support
- the family's needs have changed and the referral is withdrawn
- the referrer agrees to re-refer the family at a later date, when a volunteer is more likely to be available
- the referrer and HSEEB agree to maintain the family on the waiting list for a further specified period of time, good practice would indicate no more than a further 2-4 weeks.

The family's expectations are managed, so that from initial visit onwards they have a good understanding of how the referral is likely to progress and when they will be contacted by the scheme.

In rare circumstances, where demand is severely outpacing capacity, the trustees may decide to 'close' certain projects or all projects to new referrals if they deem it necessary. Although HSEEB finds that this is generally undesirable, it is sometimes the pragmatic course of action – in the event of long term sickness or vacancy for example. In this case all referrers will be informed.

Self-Referrals

Families may refer themselves for support by using the Self-Referral form on the HSEEB website. HSEEB will assess the family's needs and the appropriateness of offering support and liaise with any professionals currently involved with the family with consent. If deemed appropriate for support an IV will be arranged with the family.

The family will be asked to give permission to contact their GP or Health Visitor to let them know that they have referred themselves and any other relevant professionals.

Following the IV the family's needs will be assessed and appropriateness of offering home-visiting support. Other professionals may be contacted to ensure multi-agency working and communication as appropriate.

The family will be informed of the process and timeframe which will follow from point 6 in 'Referrals by a Professional' as above. Liaison with other professionals throughout the support for self-referrals will be discussed with the family.

Referrals for staff support

HSEEB recognise that there are occasions when placing a volunteer with a family may not be appropriate this may be for any of the following reasons:

- immediate crisis support is required e.g. major incident in family – death, serious illness or other tragedy.
- the complexity or level or risk of the case e.g. CIN or CP
- the knowledge, understanding and skills required to support the family are currently unavailable within the volunteer pool
- short-term support is required with specific actions to impact a specific situation e.g. Family moved into area
- Where lack of engagement by a family with other professional has been highlighted
- Where a volunteer is unable to visit the family e.g. due to change in own personal circumstances or long break due to holiday

Therefore, this work may be undertaken by members of staff in the team if the resources available to Home-Start are adequate to meet the number or complexity of cases. In this instance, the referrer will be informed.

The Manager, in consultation with the team and referrer, will decide if the referral will be accepted. The referral will be discussed and a plan put in place. This ensures all involved have clear objectives and timeframe to follow.

In circumstances where the member of staff remains in regular contact with the family (by phone, messages, or regular visits) or where the family is being supported by a family support worker employed by HSEEB, the nature and limitations of that support is described clearly to the referrer and the family.