

In the past week we've received confirmation that St Helens Borough Council is to be one of just 75 local authorities to benefit from a £302million fund which is designed to help create new 'Family Hubs'.

Family Hubs will offer a one stop shop for families, bringing together a wide range of services that can provide support and advice on everything from those early days with midwifery and health visiting services through to cookery lessons, financial advice, targeted youth groups, adult support groups and activities all working together under one roof.

The services based at the Family Hub will be open for everyone to use, and we're looking to create our first Hub at Sutton Children's Centre as part of our plans to target early years support in the areas where it's most needed.

Anyone who's been around for more than a few years might think it sounds a bit like Sure Start – the transformational programme set up by the last Labour government – and you'd be right.

Since 2010, Conservative government cuts have led to reductions of over 50% in funding for Sure Start. It's a tragedy, and now they're making local councils bid and jump through hoops for a slice of a much smaller pie.

I'm delighted we've been successful with our bid for funding and my thanks go to Cllr Nova Charlton – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – and council officers who worked so hard on putting it together.

But it surely can't be right that local councils and communities are being made to compete against each other for funding of services that should be universal. Thankfully for us, here in St Helens and due to a lot of hard work we're getting good at winning funding bids, but it shouldn't be this way.

All these things are important everywhere – making councils spend time and energy on bidding for funding rather than delivering essential services is in nobody's interest.

We've got high aspirations for our children and young people, that's why in our manifesto for the elections we've committed to taking action including working towards making St Helens a UNICEF Child Friendly Borough. We've a lot of work to do to make that happen, but our children will always come first. I'm looking forward to our first Hub opening its doors.

Best wishes to all Star readers.