

## The Family Hub: A Digital Front Door

By Halton Borough Council and Beebot AI Ltd.

Halton Borough Council is working to improve access **to family services through the implementation of a Digital Front Door**. Partnering with Beebot AI and funded by the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care, this initiative seeks to enhance service delivery, streamline processes, and provide personalised, accessible support for families. Currently in its implementation stage, the Family Hub platform is being embedded across the council to revolutionise how families interact with services.

The Family Hub is an interactive application accessible via desktop and mobile, providing 24/7 access to children's and family services. Designed to address the limitations of traditional service hours, the platform offers a **variety of features:**

- **AI-driven chatbots:** Answers common questions and provide guidance on a range of topics.
- **Automated scheduling:** Simplifies appointment booking, allowing staff to focus on more complex tasks.
- **Personalised support:** Users can receive tailored push notifications, such as updates on pregnancy stages or children's immunisations, with links to additional information and services.
- **Detailed analytics:** Offers the council insights into user behaviour, enabling data-driven decision-making and iterative improvements to the platform.
- **Live chat:** Provides a direct line to council officers for further assistance.

A strong governance structure has been key to the platform's development. A monthly steering group has guided the project, ensuring alignment with strategic goals and addressing initial concerns about AI integration. Regular digital working groups, involving key experts and stakeholders, have facilitated discussions on content development

and future plans. Additionally, a weekly digital projects group works with Beebot AI to maintain momentum and address implementation challenges.

Collaboration with other North West councils has further supported the initiative, allowing Halton to share best practices and tackle common challenges. These partnerships aim to enhance accessibility and expand the platform's reach across the region.

User safety and accessibility have been central to the Family Hub's design. Measures are in place to minimise digital footprints, safeguarding vulnerable users such as domestic abuse victims. Search results within the app are restricted to verified information to ensure reliability and accuracy. Halton is also committed to inclusivity, with features under development to support Deaf users, including sign language accessibility.

The rollout of the Family Hub followed a two-pronged approach:

### 1 Professional engagement:

A launch event in July 2024 attracted 140 professionals, providing training on the platform's features and benefits. This event was instrumental in embedding the technology into standard practices.

### 2 Public awareness campaign:

Social media campaigns and digital animations were used to educate families about the platform, highlighting its features and encouraging adoption.

The engagement phase, currently underway, focuses on increasing app usage among residents. By collaborating with internal staff, partners, and families, Halton is optimising the platform's effectiveness and reach.

The Family Hub aims to create a single digital front door for all family services, increasing accessibility and efficiency while reducing administrative burdens. By providing a digital alternative to in-person interactions, the platform empowers families to access support on their own terms. Groups that may have been underserved by traditional services, such as fathers, now have a dedicated resource to engage with family services.

Halton's long-term vision includes expanding AI capabilities within the Family Hub and exploring new opportunities for AI integration across children's services. This commitment to digital transformation positions the council as a leader in delivering accessible and efficient family services.

