

EXECUTIVE DECISION

From: Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

To: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

Subject: 23/00113 - Families First for Children - Pathfinder

Key decision: Expenditure of more than £1million, affects two or more electoral divisions, involves significant service development

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: Decision taken out of Cycle report to Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee – 16 January 2024

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This report provides the Cabinet Member with background information relating to KCC's bid to become a Pathfinder for the Families First for Children programme and offers rationale behind the recommendation to enter into relevant agreements with the DfE if KCC is selected.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services is asked (subject to selection by the DfE as an appropriate Pathfinder) to:

- A) Agree to enter into relevant agreements with the DfE to become a Pathfinder for the delivery of Families First for Children (agreement to include the acceptance of relevant Memorandums of Understandings and associated funding)
- B) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, to take other relevant actions, including but not limited to, finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Department for Education (DfE), published Stable Homes, Built on Love – an Implementation strategy and consultation on 2 February 2023, the

consultation was backed by £200m additional investment. The Families First for Children (FFC) Pathfinder is a core commitment made in the strategy.

- 1.2 Kent County Council submitted an application to become a FFC Pathfinder through Wave 2 of the programme on 6 November 2023 with support from the Assistant Chief Constable and the Director of Children's Services in the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board. This is in recognition that becoming a FFC Pathfinder will require greater integration and system level reform of services to transform the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, Family Help, Child Protection and Family Networks.
- 1.3 Approval is sought to engage in progressing the application and implementing the requirements, including spending the money in line with the conditions.
- 1.4 The Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy sets out a vision to re-balance children's social care away from costly crisis intervention to more meaningful and effective early support. It sets out actions that seek to:
 - Address urgent issues facing children and families now
 - Lay the foundations for whole system reform
 - Set national direction for change
- 1.5 The DfE states it will reform in phases, investing £200m over the next two years. After two years they will refresh this strategy, scaling up new approaches that have been tested and bring forward legislation (subject to parliamentary time).
- 1.6 The key features of this programme include:
 - Establishing a system-wide, 'Families First' culture, which addresses structural inequalities, attends to the full spectrum of families' contexts and needs, and facilitates a welcoming and effective system for children and families.
 - Clarifying and strengthening multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, ways of working and independent scrutiny. This includes strengthening the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements at strategic level.
 - Streamlining and supporting effective multi-agency information sharing and case management systems.

2. Description

- 2.1 From July 2023 to March 2025, DfE is investing over £45 million to design and test radical reforms in a number of local areas, across the following policies:
 - Family Help
 - Child Protection

- Family Network Support Packages (FNSPs)
 - Safeguarding Partners
- 2.2 The Pathfinder draws on evidence and existing good practice, including from other government programmes:
- [Family hubs and Start for life](#)
 - [Supporting families](#)
 - [Reducing parental conflict](#)
 - [Strengthening families, protecting children](#)

This is Wave 2 of the Families First for Children which will draw learning from Wave 1 pathfinders already working with the DfE.

- 2.3 The new end-to-end system will include four key elements:
- locally based, multi-disciplinary family help services, providing intensive, non-stigmatising and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families
 - a child protection response carried out by social workers with greater expertise and experience, and access to dedicated and skilled multi-agency input, working with family help to protect children who are suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm
 - greater use of family networks, with increased use of family group decision-making, facilitated by FNSPs to remove any financial or practical barriers family networks may face
 - updated and strengthened local multi-agency leadership through changes to safeguarding partner arrangements
 - As these changes will have a significant impact on frontline delivery, we are co-designing the new systems with local areas and taking a 'test and learn' approach to delivery ahead of any further roll-out. We will regularly share insights from the programme with the wider sector and partners to support all areas to progress towards our service transformation vision.

3. Key Features and minimum expectations:

- 3.1 As mentioned in 2.1 above, there are four policy areas that require local design in order to test and pilot reform. Below are the requirements for overarching system reform:
- Establish a system-wide, 'families first' culture, which addresses structural inequalities, attends to the full spectrum of families' contexts and needs, and facilitates a welcoming and effective system for children and families.

- Clarify and strengthen multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASAs), ways of working and independent scrutiny. This includes strengthening the role of education in MASA at strategic level.
- Streamline and support effective multi-agency information sharing and case management systems.
- Involve, gather and act on feedback from children and young people, families, and communities in designing and testing the Pathfinder. Use evidence-based practice (including ethical considerations) in doing so.
- Develop, communicate and use accessible, neutral and strengths-based language with families involved with the reformed system.
- Identify Lead Safeguarding Partners as the LA Chief Executive, Chief Officer of Police and Chief Executive of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) (or member of the ICB executive group).
- Lead Safeguarding Partners are expected to identify and name Delegate Safeguarding Partners.
- Appoint a Partnership Chair at Delegated Safeguarding Partner level (agreed by all three partners) that escalates issues to the Lead Safeguarding Partners.
- Ensure a separate, independent and accountable system of scrutiny is in place for MASA.
- Ensure all safeguarding partners allocate shared, equitable and adequate funding to MASA and spend it in line with agreed priorities.
- Develop and test formal models of engaging education at the strategic level of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.
- Ensure that case management and information sharing processes can facilitate timely and appropriate information sharing across partners.

3.2 For the Family Help strand, the key features are as follows:

- Establish a multi-disciplinary family help team to provide seamless support for families, spanning targeted early help and child in need (section 17 of the Children Act 1989).
- Integrate Family Help within existing systems and services.
- Deliver an integrated 'front door' and service that is welcoming, effectively identifies families' strengths and needs and decides on the appropriate lead practitioner for a family.
- Establish the Family Help Lead Practitioner (FHLP) role. This should be whoever is best placed to provide this role for the family and can include practitioners not employed by the LA.
- Establish clear thresholds and a single, family help assessment and plan for families.
- Establish proportionate plans for case management, oversight and supervision, considering increasing and decreasing needs over time.

- Establish a core multi-disciplinary family help team led by the LA. The core service will include a practice supervisor/manager, social workers and family support workers and areas will determine who else should be involved.
- Align family help with local SEND services (e.g. ensure existing disabled children and wider SEND teams are appropriately embedded).
- Clarify what strategic and systemic integration with family hubs looks like (e.g., exploring the relationship between the 'front door' and family hub 'single point of access').
- Establish methods for actively engaging, involving and building partnerships with voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations (e.g., VCS Alliance model), including in strategy and system design.
- Involve family group decision making (FGDM) coordinators in family engagement.
- Establish and publicise an accessible, 'front door' into Family Help (and other services) which ensures families are swiftly allocated to the correct part of the system.
- Clarify the process for threshold decisions and allocation for practitioners. This will include, where the section 47 threshold is met, requiring allocation to both a lead child protection practitioner and family help lead practitioner - and where section 47 threshold is not met, meaning allocation to family help to determine what further assessment/support may be required.
- Establish how to develop a strengths-based, whole family assessment for all families that removes duplication of targeted early help and child in need assessments for families in family help, to create a single 'family help assessment' that feeds into a single 'family help plan' for the family.
- Establish a plan for proportionate oversight and supervision across family help cases, carried out by a senior practitioner with appropriate knowledge and skills for the specific case.

3.3 For the Child Protection strand, the key features are as follows:

- Establish the Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP) role, underpinned by clear skills, responsibilities, processes co-working with family help, supervision and case oversight.
- Operationalise a multi-agency child protection team (MACPT), secure dedicated resource across agencies and clarify its' core functions.
- Improve parents' experiences and engagement with child protection, including through independent parental representation.
- Develop the role and the responsibilities of the Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP).

- Test the feasibility of the LCPP chairing child protection conferences to understand benefits and challenges for decision making, and how this affects parents' and children's experiences.
- Determine how supervision, coaching and support arrangements around case work will work between the LCPP and FHLP.
- Establish robust supervision arrangements which are focused on practice (working with families and identifying risk), rather than process.
- Establish a multi-agency child protection team. Core members to include children's social care, health (needs dependent e.g. mental health, health visitor for vulnerable infants), police and education, with clear resourcing agreements in place. The team will be responsible for child protection resulting from intra- and extra- familial harm – as such, the team will need to be equipped to respond to the full spectrum of children and young people (vulnerable infants, adolescents, those living away from home) and harms (e.g. domestic abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation).
- Develop a clear strategy for engaging with parents in child protection to ensure they are supported and helped to understand the process, outcomes and how they can be supported to make changes. To include clarity about the information and support that is provided at each stage, how parents can raise concerns and how feedback about experiences is gathered.
- Test involvement of family and representatives in child protection conferences.
- Test timing of family group decision making (FGDM) in the child protection process.

3.4 For the Family Networks strand, the key features are as follows:

- Establish Family Networks as a 'golden thread' throughout the reformed system.
- Align family group decision making (FGDM)/conferencing (FGC) with Family Help and Child Protection processes.
- Test provision of practical and financial support via Family Network Support Packages (FNSP).
- Offer family group decision-making (FGDM) to all families by default. It should be facilitated by an independent coordinator and families should be given space for private family time.
- Make family engagement in FGDM a pre-requisite to accessing Family Network Support Packages (FNSPs) for any cohort (e.g. Family Help, Child Protection, and pre-proceedings).

- Offer all families at pre-proceedings family group conferencing (FGC) in line with the principles of the specific FGC model - FGC Accreditation - Family Rights Group (frg.org.uk).
- Establish an approach to child protection conferences which is empowering, strengths-based and organised in a way which harnesses the contributions of wider Family Networks.
- Provide practical support and funding to family networks via FNSPs when (i) a child has a suitable family network but (ii) there is a barrier to them stepping in and providing support, that could otherwise be resolved through financial and practical help from the local authority.
- FNSPs must meet the bespoke needs of this individual family, and not reflect a “one size fits all” approach (e.g., a blanket allowance, a salary for an employed practitioner, or a pre-made package of services)

3.5 The proposed changes to deliver the Families First for Children Model in KCC is as follows:

INTEGRATED FRONT DOOR (no change)

(Application of the SUPPORT LEVEL GUIDANCE)



FAMILY HELP SERVICE (NEW)

Service Manager (managing multi-disciplinary teams)

(LEVEL 3 – SUPPORT LEVEL GUIDANCE definitions, single family help assessment)

Lead Family Help Practitioner (NEW)

Merge teams from Early Help, District Children Social Work teams and Adolescent Safeguarding Service to create multi-disciplinary teams **AND a link to the Strengthening Independence Service, SEN Inclusion advisors, Education Services, Youth Justice, Health visitors, Voluntary Services**



MULTI AGENCY CHILD PROTECTION SERVICE (NEW)

Service Manager (managing MACP Teams and Partnership)

Lead Child Protection Practitioner (NEW)

(Merge District Children Social Work teams and Child Protection Chairs Service)

Create Multi-disciplinary Teams made up Social Workers, Social Work Assistants, Family Group Decision Making Leads/Social Connections and COLOCATION of **Health (MH (children and adults), Substance misuse services (children and adults), Domestic abuse workers with a LINK to Education, Police, Probation Services**

4. Financial Implications

4.1 From July 2023 to March 2025, the DfE is investing over £45 million to design and test radical reforms in a number of local areas, across the following policies:

- Family Help
- Child Protection
- Family Network Support Packages (FNSPs)
- Safeguarding Partners

4.2 £19.5 million funding is available for Wave 2 of the FFC Pathfinder in the financial year 2024-2025.

4.3 DfE have banded funding based on the threshold of Children in Need. Due to the size of Kent, the bid can be up to and including £5m. The bid submission for KCC is £4,996,042, with a specific delivery breakdown and to be spent on transformation for evaluation in 2025.

5. Options considered

5.1 An alternative option is not to consider participating as a Pathfinder for the FFC, however KCC has significant pressures across the Integrated Children's Services and to attempt to transform the services with funding to support this is welcomed. By not attempting to be a Pathfinder could find the Council having to adopt a way of working that does not suit such a large authority and in exploring these opportunities is in line with Objective 4: Further transforming the operating model of the Council of Securing Kent's Future.

6. Policy Framework

6.1 The proposed decision supports Framing Kent's Future Our Council Strategy 2022-2026, specifically Priority 4 New Models of Care and Support:

“To support the most vulnerable children and families in our county, ensuring our social work practice supports manageable caseloads, reflective learning, joined up safeguarding and effective corporate parenting arrangements incorporating the priorities as listed below:

- *Support further improvement in the quality of social care practice through investing in our children's social care workforce, ensuring appropriate caseloads and reflective learning time available for our social workers, and further developing the Kent Social Work Academy.*
- *Embed our 'One front door' approach, working with partners to ensure referrals to children's social care are efficiently and consistently*

managed to provide the child or family with the right help at the right time.

- *Embed a whole-family approach, tackling the underlying problems that might cause concern in a child's family, such as domestic abuse, substance misuse and parental mental health."*

6.2 Securing Kent's Future has a specific focus on driving management culture across all services. The focus on Best Value in Securing Kent's Future includes a specific example on an overreliance in KCC on delivering change through separate project and programme management resources. Whilst it is recognised that projects having dedicated change resource which can be expensive and create a dislocation between projects and services, this funding is predicated on the inclusion of project resource to drive change. In recognition of delivering change being the responsibility of all managers across the organisation, the project resource is incorporated in the funding and will be managed by the Director of Operational Integrated Children Services

7. Legal Implications

7.1 KCC will be required to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding and will be expected to deliver against the plan submitted with the application. There will be full reporting expectations against progress and a likely clause that the funding could be reclaimed if delivery is not as documented.

7.2 Legal advice would be sought in relation to any subsequent contractual activity in developing the pilot projects.

8. Equalities Implications

8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) screening has been completed and no high negative impacts have been identified. The EQIA will continue to be developed and reviewed as this project progresses.

9. Other Corporate Implications

9.1 In the development of the Pathfinders, there will be a need for support from Finance, Legal and ICT. Longer-term there is likely to be a need for support from HR.

10. Governance

10.1 Oversight of the development and successes of the Pathfinder programmes would be by the Director of Operations - Integrated Children's Services within

the CYPE Directorate.

11. Data Protection implications

11.1 The Data Protection Impact Assessment will be completed once it is known whether we are successful as participants/leaders in the Pathfinder programmes.

12 Recommendation(s):

12.1 The Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services is asked (subject to selection by the DfE as an appropriate Pathfinder) to:

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Background Documents:

[Families first for children \(FFC\) pathfinder programme and family networks pilot \(FNP\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

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