

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF OFFICER DECISION

Executive

DECISION TAKEN BY:

Christine McInnes, Interim Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education

DECISION NO:

OD/26/00006

For publication

Subject matter: Children, Families and Youth Grant 2026 – 2029 (Families First Partnership Programme)

Cabinet Member decision to which this action relates:

[Decision - 25/00047 - Children's Social Care Prevention Grant 2025/2026 \(Families First\)](#)

Decision:

As Interim Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education, I agree to:

APPROVE the acceptance of the Children, Families and Youth Grant for the Families First Programme from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for the following three years: 2026/2027, 2027/2028 and 2028/2029, to enable the continuation of the deployment of grant for preparatory and design activities and the funding of existing services which comply with the grant conditions and are in line with the principles of key decision (25/00047).

*This decision **does not authorise** the implementation or deployment of the Families First for Children model beyond the services that are already in operation in Kent and already align to the Families First for Children model. Any decision to implement the model through the delivery of new services, including the use of the grant operationally to achieve new services, would need to be subject to a **separate Key Decision***

Reason(s) for decision:

Central Government has launched the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme to support local authorities and their partners to deliver a system reform focused on providing effective early help, family support and child protection services, in response to recommendations from: The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, and The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's report on Child Protection in England. These reforms bring a significant shift and refocus how we help, protect and support children and families.

The aim of the Families First Programme is to deliver a fully integrated, family-centred system of support underpinned by strong multi-agency collaboration and shared accountability. Families will access and receive the right help at the right time from trusted practitioners who understand their story, coordinating support and providing consistent presence throughout their journey. The programme also seeks to deliver financial sustainability, ensuring that resources are used efficiently to deliver long-term value and improved outcomes.

Funding to implement the Families First Programme has been included within the Children, Families and Youth Grant. This funding will enable the continued design and delivery of *services that are already in operation in Kent and already align to the Families First for Children model*. The eventual implementation of a new, end-to-end system for Children's Social Care in Kent County Council would need to be subject to a future key decision, and will be focused on four key areas:

- Strengthening multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.
- Establishing targeted, multi-disciplinary Family Help services for children and families eligible for, or receiving targeted early help and/or Child in Need services, which will include establishing Family Help Lead Practitioners and reviewing the Support Level Guidance document with the partner agencies.
- Introducing expert-led, dedicated Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs), which will include Lead Child Protection Practitioners.
- Providing practical and financial support for family networks, to keep more children with their family and friends networks, where safe to do so, throughout the reformed system

The decision is required to formalise the acceptance and allocation of the [Children, Families and Youth Grant](#) funding for the Families First Partnership Programme for 2026/2027, 2027/2028 and 2028/2029. The funding for the next three financial years has already been confirmed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and has been recognised in the Council's 2026-29 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). This funding provides a critical opportunity to implement the Families First transformation model, which aligns with national reform priorities and KCC's strategic objectives for children's services. A separate key decision would need to be taken to approve the Families First implementation plan.

The Council has commenced the transformation journey and is progressing to plan. Programme governance is in place, delivery plans are baselined, and workstream milestones for model design, and engagement are on track against the current timetable

Formally accepting the Children, Families and Youth Grant aligns directly with Aim 3: Supporting Residents That Need Help in the [Reforming Kent 2025–2028 Strategy](#), as it strengthens Kent's ability to embed a greater focus on prevention and early intervention and empower residents to take responsibility for improving their own outcomes. The grant directly supports our priorities to give families timely access to the right support so they can stay together wherever possible, to invest in prevention where financially viable and to put in place practical early-help measures that empower families to make sensible life choices.

The Children's Wellbeing and School's Bill which is currently being debated in Parliament will mandate the above reforms. By declining the acceptance of the Children, Families and Youth Grant, Kent County Council will have to identify its own financial resources to support the transformation activity, to implement the new ways of working and to ensure that the Council is meeting its legal obligations to support children and families. This will create more financial pressures for the Council.

Financial Implications:

The MHCLG have confirmed Kent County Council will receive funding for the Families First Partnership Programme totalling £21.7 million for 2026/2027, £21.7 million for 2027/2028 and £18.5 million for 2028/2029. This ring-fenced grant replaces funding previously received separately in 2025-26, through the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant (£6.7m) and Children's & Families Grant (Supporting Families, £6m), along with additional new investment of £8.9m. Final grant conditions are expected to be published in April 2026, with draft terms set out within the Local Government Settlement.

Families First Partnership (FFP) grant is expected to be spent exclusively on implementing Family Help, multi-agency child protection teams and family group decision-making, with the central

purpose of strengthening prevention and reducing reliance on children entering care. Existing Preventative Services are expected to continue until new ones are operational. The draft grant conditions indicate the grant is not expected to replace or reduce existing prevention spending on non-statutory services, and should be used to provide additional investments. But at the same time funding can be applied to continue to deliver services that meet the policy principles set out in the FFP programme guidance and relevant statutory guidance. Overall, the majority of the grant is intended to fund delivery of new and updated services (as set out in local delivery plans) along with funding local planning and transformation activity. It is currently estimated at least £12.8m will be used to support existing services (including continuation, in the interim, of early help services previously by Support Families funding) and transformational project activities, until the new model is implemented. This will be kept under review and refreshed when final grant conditions are published and proposed model developed.

During this period the Council must report regularly on progress, participate in required data collections and engage with DfE where delivery concerns arise.

Should the Council fail to adhere to the grant conditions, Central Government will facilitate engagement with the authority to gain assurance. If the failure has a negative impact on children's services, and this results from systemic weakness in leadership, governance and culture, the MHCLG may consider the Council to have failed to meet its Best Value duty. The Department of Education may also require the Council to participate in improvement or intervention programmes.

There are financial risks inherent in accepting ringfenced grant funding that is contingent on delivery. The implementation of the model in Kent is dependent on a separate key decision by the Lead Cabinet Member; if this decision is not approved, it is possible some or all of the grant may need to be returned and preparatory expenditure would need to be absorbed within existing resources. Wider risks are associated with slippage in design or implementation that delays the point at which new services become operational, and workforce or partner agency resource capacity constraints that could limit the establishment and functioning of multi-agency teams. Further risks are linked with committing spend on the basis of draft grant conditions and terms under existing data returns, rather than in line with final grant conditions and data returns.

To manage these risks, the programme has put in place strong governance and assurance arrangements, including a Programme Board overseeing scope, spend, benefits and monthly finance reviews. Delivery is structured through phased implementation with contingency planning and options to re-sequence activities where needed to protect the critical path, with priority given to Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams as indicated by the DfE. Workforce and partner readiness is supported through joint planning with Health, Police and Education partners and agreed operational procedures. Current activity is focused on optimising the proposed design and optimising piloting/testing activities where possible. Spending commitments continue to be made in line with data returns for 2025-26, until such time, greater clarity is provided for 2026-27 and plans can be adjusted accordingly.

Taking these mitigations into account, our assessment is that the programme is well-placed to deliver against the draft grant's terms and conditions, subject to continued partner engagement and timely internal decision-making. We will continue to evidence delivery through quarterly returns, in-year variance reports, and benefits tracking to demonstrate that spend is aligned to prevention and that existing prevention budgets are not displaced.

Legal implications:

The Corporate Director of Children's Services (DCS) at Kent County Council has statutory duties outlined in Section 18 of the Children Act 2004. These duties involve ensuring the delivery of Local Authority Social Care functions for children and young people. This includes, but is not limited to, providing services that meet the needs of all children, youth, including the most vulnerable, and their

families. Acceptance of any grant money does mean that Kent County Council is obligated to comply with the delivery requirements, and the terms and conditions that accompany the funding.

The Council will be required to take a separate Key Decision in due course on implementing the Families First for Children model, once the design phase is complete. This Key Decision will be taken by the Lead Cabinet Member, following consideration by Cabinet Committee, in line with the Council's Constitution and decision-making framework. Acceptance of the Children, Families and Youth Grant does not predetermine the outcome of that future decision.

Equality Implications:

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed and there are no anticipated adverse impacts that are associated with the acceptance of the Families First Partnership Programme funding given the expectation that any future operations and activity will be designed to complement, develop and build on established family support services. The funding will further support diverse families that are seldom heard, which aligns Aim 3 of our Reforming Kent Strategy, 'Supporting residents That Need Help'

Comments received from any Members or Officers consulted:

The Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services has been consulted and confirms approval for the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education to proceed with the Officer Decision to accept and take receipt of the Children, Families and Youth Grant (Families First Partnership) from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for the following three years: 2026/2027, 2027/2028 and 2028/2029.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

The MHCLG have already confirmed the Funding for Families First Partnership Programme for 2026/2027, 2027/2028 and 2028/2029. The alternative option is to refuse this funding. The implementation of the new Families First Partnership Model is currently being debated in Parliament, through the Children Wellbeing and Schools Bill, and is expected to become a legal requirement this year. Therefore, refusing this funding would mean any costs associated with implementation of this new model would have to be met solely by the Council's existing budget.

Considering the Council's current financial pressures, the utilisation of this grant presents a timely and appropriate opportunity to support service transformation and improve outcomes for children and families.

Any conflict of interest declared by any executive member consulted by the decision maker and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:



Signature

Date: 18 March 2026