
From: Christine McInnes, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

To: Paul Webb, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Subject: Implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme

Decision no: 26/00029

Key Decision:

- It affects more than 2 Electoral Divisions
- It involves expenditure or savings of maximum £1m – including if over several phases

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on 14 July 2025

Future Pathway of report: *Cabinet Member Decision*

Electoral Division: All

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary: This report seeks approval to implement the Target Operating Model for the Families First Partnership Programme in Kent.

The report sets out the proposed high-level model for integrating Family Help and child protection services, including the introduction of Family Help Lead Practitioners, Lead Child Protection Practitioners, and the establishment of Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs) in line with requirements in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.

It describes how these roles and structures will operate in Kent to deliver a more coordinated, consistent, and effective system of support, safeguarding and intervention for children and families.

The report also outlines how Family Group Decision Making will be embedded across the system of help, support, and protection, in line with expectations set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026. This includes strengthening the role of families in decision-making and ensuring that practice reflects a whole-family, strengths-based approach.

The proposed model represents a strategic shift from a fragmented and reactive system to a more integrated, preventative, and family-centred approach. It is designed to improve outcomes for children and families, strengthen multi-agency accountability, and ensure more timely and effective safeguarding responses.

This report presents the high-level Target Operating Model and associated practice approach, co-designed with operational staff, partner agencies, children, and families.

Detailed organisational structures, workflows, and supporting operational frameworks are not included at this stage and will be developed during the implementation phase, supported by appropriate governance and programme management arrangements.

The report seeks approval to proceed with implementation of this model.

Recommendation(s):

That the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services agree to:

- (a) Approve the implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme Target Operating Model in Kent.
- (b) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, to take all necessary actions to utilise and allocate the Children, Families and Youth Grant and to implement the Families First Partnership Programme Target Operating Model in Kent in line with Government expectations including, but not limited to, determining the expenditure of the grant.
- (c) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, in consultation with the Head of Law to negotiate, finalise the terms of, and enter into any contracts or other legal agreements required to implement this decision

As set out in the RoD (appendix A).

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Families First Partnership Programme is a national strategic transformation programme designed to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families. It is intended to shift the system from a reactive, crisis-led approach to one that prioritises earlier intervention, prevention, and whole-family support. The programme aligns with the reforms set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, which received Royal Assent on 30 April 2026.
- 1.2 The programme brings together early help and statutory children's social care into a more integrated and coherent system. It introduces a high-level Target Operating Model that strengthens coordination across services, clarifies accountability, and ensures that children and families receive the right support at the right time. Central to this approach is closer multi-agency working across children's services, education, health, and policing, particularly in relation to safeguarding and child protection. Further detail is set out in Appendix F and G.

- 1.3 This report sets out the proposed implementation of the Target Operating Model in Kent, including the introduction of the Family Help model, the establishment of Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams, and new practice roles such as Family Help Lead Practitioners and Lead Child Protection Practitioners. It also outlines how Family Group Decision Making will be embedded across the system in line with the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026. The report focuses on the overall model and approach to delivery and seeks approval to proceed with implementation

2. Key Considerations

- 2.1 The Families First Partnership Programme is a national reform programme that requires local authorities and partners to redesign how support is delivered to children and families. It focuses on earlier intervention, stronger multi-agency working, and improved outcomes for children. Kent has already accepted the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and completed initial design and co-production work (as agreed in Key Decision 25/00047) and is now seeking approval to implement its Target Operating Model ahead of the Government's April 2027 deadline.
- 2.2 The proposed model aligns with the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, which received Royal Assent on 30 April 2026. The Act places emphasis on earlier intervention and prevention, stronger multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and increased involvement of families in decision making. The Families First Partnership Programme positions Kent to meet these expectations and adopt emerging best practices in advance of further national policy and regulatory changes.
- 2.3 A key consideration is the integration of early help and statutory children's social care into a single, coherent system. The proposed Family Help model creates a unified structure that improves coordination across services, reduced duplication and handoffs between teams and ensures families experience a more consistent and seamless service. The introduction of a Lead Practitioner role provides a single, accountable professional to coordinate support and maintain relationships with families. Further detail is set out in Appendix D and E.
- 2.4 The establishment of Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams represents a significant shift in how safeguarding responsibilities are delivered. By bringing together professionals from children's social care, police, health, and education ensures decision making will be timelier and more informed, accountability for safeguarding activity will be clearer and professional oversight will be strengthened. Further detail is set out in Appendix B and C.
- 2.5 The model embeds Family Group Decision Making as a core element of practice across early help and child protection. This reflects both legislative expectations and evidence that involving families in decision-making in turn improves engagement and ownership, leads to more sustainable outcomes, and reduces the need for statutory intervention. Appendix H is attached for a summary related to Family Group Decision Making.
- 2.6 Successful implementation will require significant workforce and cultural change. The model introduces new roles, responsibilities, and ways of working,

and will require training and development for staff, stronger leadership and oversight and effective engagement with partners across the system. This represents a shift towards a more collaborative, strengths based and relationship focussed approach to practice.

- 2.7 This decision seeks approval of the high-level Target Operating Model. Detailed operational design, including structures, workflows and processes, will be developed and implemented following co-production and endorsement by Divisional Management Team with oversight by the Directorate Management Team. Implementation will need to be carefully managed to maintain service continuity, minimise disruption to children and families and ensure partner organisations are aligned and fully engaged.
- 2.8 Failure to implement the model would result in the Council being non-compliant with national requirements, jeopardise access to future funding, and increase the likelihood of enhanced scrutiny from Central Government, including the potential for formal improvement intervention. In addition, not proceeding would maintain the current fragmented system, limiting the Council's ability to improve outcomes for children and families and increasing ongoing pressure on statutory services.

3. Background

- 3.1 Central Government has committed total of £2.4 billion over a 3- year period in the Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme to support local authorities and their partners to deliver system-wide reform. The programme focuses on implementing Family Help, Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams, and Family Group Decision-Making, in response to recommendations from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.
- 3.2 The Families First Programme aims to deliver a fully integrated, family-centred system of support, underpinned by strong partnership working and shared accountability. It is expected families will receive the right help at the right time from practitioners who understand their circumstances, coordinate support effectively and provide consistency throughout their journey. The Government is also expecting the programme to support greater financial effectiveness by ensuring resources are used more efficiently to deliver long-term value.
- 3.3 These reforms represent a significant shift in how services support children and families, with a stronger emphasis on early intervention, multi-agency working and better outcomes.
- 3.4 The programme aligns with the Government's vision for transforming children's social care and is expected to deliver the four outcomes set out in the Children's Social Care national framework:
 - Outcome 1: children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need.
 - Outcome 2: children and young people are supported by their family network.
 - Outcome 3: children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes.
 - Outcome 4: children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes.

4. Options considered and dismissed, and associated risk

- 4.1 The alternative option would be to not proceed with the implementation of the Families First Model. However, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act, which received Royal Assent on 29 April 2026, and the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 make these reforms a statutory requirement.
- 4.2 Failure to implement the model would result in the Council being non-compliant with national legislation and statutory guidance, jeopardise future funding, and increase the likelihood of enhanced scrutiny from Central Government, including the potential for formal improvement intervention.

5. How the proposed decision supports the Council's Strategic Statement

- 5.1 Approval of the implementation of the Families First for Children Target Operating Model aligns directly with Aim 3 of the [Reforming Kent 2025–2028 Strategy](#). It strengthens the Council's ability to prioritise prevention and early intervention, ensuring that families receive timely and coordinated support. The programme supports the Council's strategic priorities by enabling families to access the right support at the right time, helping them to stay together wherever possible, and reducing the need for more intensive statutory interventions. It also promotes effectiveness through investing in preventative services and empowering families to improve their own outcomes.
- 5.2 The programme will be delivered in the context of planned Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The Families First model has been designed to be flexible and transferable, enabling it to be readily implemented within future organisational arrangements, if required, while maintaining continuity of service delivery and compliance with national requirements.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The Families First model directly impacts the Children's Social Care and Early Help services of the Council with a total net revenue budget of £297 million in 2026-27 of which £193m relates to children's placements/support, and £104m to staffing. This budget is funded from the Council's General Fund. The revenue staffing budget lines mainly affected by this proposal are "Early Help and Preventative Services," "Children Social Work Services – Assessment & Safeguarding Service (Operational Teams)" and "Disabled Children and Young People Service (0-17) – Assessment Service". The Council has received funding towards implementing the Families First Partnership Programme, known as the Children's, Families and Youth Grant, 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 and Families Grant (Supporting Families, £6m), along with additional new investment of £8.9m. The funding is ring-fenced for the direct investment in new and updated services to deliver family help, multi-agency protection teams, and support for family networks along with the funding transformational activity.

Failure to implement the Families First model in line with Government expectations may result in the potential loss of government funding.

- 6.2 Approximate spending categories for the £21.7m grant are set out below. In 2028-29 the grant is set up to reduce to £18.5m reflecting the expectation the model will be implemented from April 2027, and transformation activities will no longer be required:

	£' s
Transformational Activities	1,100,000 - 1,959,000
Existing services aligned to Family First Pillars	4,800,000
Ongoing delivery of services previously funded from Supporting Families Grant	6,012,700
Delivery of new and updated services	8,838,900 – 9,697,900
Total Grant	21,712,500

- 6.3 The delivery of this new targeted operating model will involve both the reorganisation of existing children services and the introduction of specific new posts, as set out in the Government policy, by creating additional duties to roles that are currently in place. Examples include the Lead Child Protection Practitioner and Education Lead in the Multi Agency Child Protection Teams, which are currently estimated to cost in region of c£4.5m. The final cost of the model is yet to be determined but will be designed to be affordable within the existing staffing budget and additional grant funding.
- 6.4 The government expects new posts arising from implementation of this new model to be fully funded from the grant. The Government has only confirmed grant funding for 3 years initially (up to end March 2029) and reducing in the third year by £3.2m. Therefore, there is risk, the funding could cease or reduce further after this time, and the Council will still be required to deliver and fund the new legislative duties arising from the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and associated guidance. The Government has stated it expects this new model, with its enhanced focus on prevention, to reduce the number of children entering care and along with the improved use of kinship and fostering, to generate better outcomes and further savings from reducing the use of residential placements for reinvestment. However, the scale of the financial benefit in a local authority, such as Kent, that already has an established kinship model and lower numbers of looked after children per head of the population is yet to be fully evidenced. Therefore, there is less confidence that the long-term sustainability of the new model can be achieved through this route, to mitigate the risk of their being a shortfall in future funding if the grant ceases or reduces further after March 2029. The Council will need to plan in future for either ongoing investment (through Council tax or savings generated from the model) or for a further reorganisation of services after this point. The later will be considered when the final structure is agreed and kept under review and informed by future government announcements.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 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. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 legally obliges Kent County Council to comply with the delivery requirements.
- 7.2 Given that the funding agreement extends beyond the anticipated "go live" date for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in 2028, legal consideration has been given to the continuity of statutory duties and the future governance arrangements required to maintain compliance. The obligations attached to the grant will continue to apply regardless of structural changes arising from LGR.
- 7.3 Once the preferred LGR model is confirmed in July 2026, the programme will be aligned with the agreed transition arrangements to ensure that grant conditions, accountability for spend, and decision-making responsibilities may transfer lawfully to any successor body or bodies. This will include mapping statutory functions, review governance frameworks, and establishing clear mechanisms for continuity of service delivery during and after the transition. The Executive decision now being sought to be made will therefore establish a secure basis for implementation, whilst noting that formal variation or transfer arrangements may be required once LGR outcomes are confirmed.

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1 Future operations and activity will be designed to complement, develop, and build on established family support services, including supporting diverse families that are seldom heard, which aligns Aim 3 of our Reforming Kent Strategy, 'Supporting residents That Need Help'. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed for the Families First Partnership Programme, considering potential impacts on individuals and families with protected characteristics. While the reforms introduced through Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 may increase early identification, information-sharing and multi-agency involvement for some groups, no disproportionate negative impacts have been identified that cannot be mitigated.
- 8.2 Mitigating actions are embedded within the programme design, including the consistent application of relational, trauma-informed practice; proportionate use of Family Help plans to support rather than penalise families; transparent and lawful information-sharing practices; and strengthened expectations around anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice across agencies. The reforms also enhance family and community involvement, particularly through Family Group Decision-Making, to ensure plans are co-produced and culturally responsive, and that caring responsibilities are shared appropriately.
- 8.3 Specialist roles and multi-agency structures are designed to improve professional oversight, reduce bias, and support consistent, timely decision-

making, while system design and practice guidance emphasise privacy, dignity, and inclusion for all families. Equality impacts will continue to be monitored through implementation, supervision, data analysis and ongoing programme governance, and mitigations will be strengthened where required.

9. Data Protection Implications

9.1 A Data Protection Impact assessment (DPIA) has been completed and the following risks and mitigations have been identified.

- There is a risk that information may be shared or accessed by parties who do not need to access it. Mitigation - Access to systems will be based on level of need and individuals will only have access to information relevant to their role. When partners have access to The Liberi/ Liquid Logic Case Management System they will be signed up to the appropriate access policy and will have specific user profiles which will limit their access and require extra justification around accessing KCC information.
- There is a risk that information relating to the wrong child is accidentally shared. Mitigation – The implementation of a unique, universal identifier across all organisations will ensure each organisation is referring to the same child is to be rolled out nationally.

10. Governance

10.1 This decision approves the high-level Target Operating Model, with detailed operational design (including structures, workflows, and processes) to be developed and implemented following co-production and endorsement by the Divisional Management Team with oversight by the Directorate Management Team. Implementation will be carefully managed to maintain service continuity and effective partner alignment.

10.2 Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, to take all necessary actions to utilise and allocate the Children, Families and Youth Grant and to implement the Families First Partnership Programme Target Operating Model in Kent in line with Government expectations including, but not limited to, determining the expenditure of the grant.

10.3 Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, in consultation with the Head of Law to negotiate, finalise the terms of, and enter into any contracts or other legal agreements required to implement this decision.

10.4 The programme will be delivered in the context of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), with the model designed to be flexible and transferable to future arrangements while maintaining continuity and compliance with national requirements

11. Conclusions

- 11.1 The Families First Partnership Programme represents a significant opportunity to transform how support is delivered to children, young people, and families in Kent. The proposed Target Operating Model brings together early help and statutory services into a more integrated, coherent, and effective system, with a clear focus on earlier intervention, improved multi-agency working, and better outcomes for families.
- 11.2 The introduction of the Family Help model, Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams, and new practice roles, alongside the embedding of Family Group Decision Making, will strengthen coordination, accountability, and consistency across the system. This will enable children and families to receive the right support at the right time, reduce escalation into statutory services, and improve safeguarding responses.
- 11.3 The model has been designed to align with the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, which received Royal Assent on 30 April 2026, and positions Kent to meet statutory requirements and national expectations. It also supports the Council's strategic priorities by promoting prevention, improving outcomes, and contributing to long-term financial sustainability.
- 11.4 Approval of this decision will enable the Council, working with its partners, to proceed with implementation of the agreed Target Operating Model. This will support the delivery of a more joined-up, family-centred system that is better equipped to respond to need, manage demand, and deliver improved outcomes for children and families across Kent.
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Recommendation(s):

That the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services agree to:

- (a) Approve the implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme Target Operating Model in Kent.
- (b) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, to take all necessary actions to utilise and allocate the Children, Families and Youth Grant and to implement the Families First Partnership Programme Target Operating Model in Kent in line with Government expectations including, but not limited to, determining the expenditure of the grant.
- (c) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, in consultation with the Head of Law to negotiate, finalise the terms of, and enter into any contracts or other legal agreements required to implement this decision

As set out in the RoD (appendix A).

10. Background Documents

[Families First Partnership Programme Guide.](#)
[Children's Social Care National Framework](#)
[Delivering the children's social care reset](#)
Equality Impact Assessment
Data Protection Impact Assessment

11. Appendices

- A. Record of Decision
- B. Combined Multi Agency Child Protection Team Roles
- C. Multi Agency Child Protection Team Duties
- D. Family Help Model
- E. Family Help Lead Practitioner Model
- F. Target Operating Model case flow
- G. Target Operating Model Cabinet summary
- H. Family Group Decision making Cabinet summary.

12. Contact details *(please insert details below)*

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