

From: **Chris Palmer, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**

Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education

To: **Children's Young People and Education Cabinet Committee – 15 July 2024**

Subject: **Children's Social Care Prevention Grant 2025/2026 (Families First)**

Key Decision: Overall service value exceeds £1m and affects more than two Electoral Divisions.

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: None

Future Pathway of report: None

Electoral Division: All

Summary:

This report sets out the reasoning for accepting the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), approving the development of the required Families First model in Kent to comply with anticipated legislation and Families First programme guidance principles and delegating the detailed service design and acceptance of future years' grants to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education.

A successful Families First programme in Kent will deliver a fully integrated, family-centred system of support for children aged 0-18 or 0–25 for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) in line with the outcomes outlined in the National Children's Social Care Framework. Built on strong multi-agency collaboration and shared accountability, the programme will ensure that families receive and access the right help at the right time from trusted practitioners who understand their story and provide consistent guidance throughout their journey.

Recommendation(s):

The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to **CONSIDER** and **ENDORSE**, or **MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS** to the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services on the proposed decision as set out in the Proposed Record of Decision (PROD).

1. Introduction

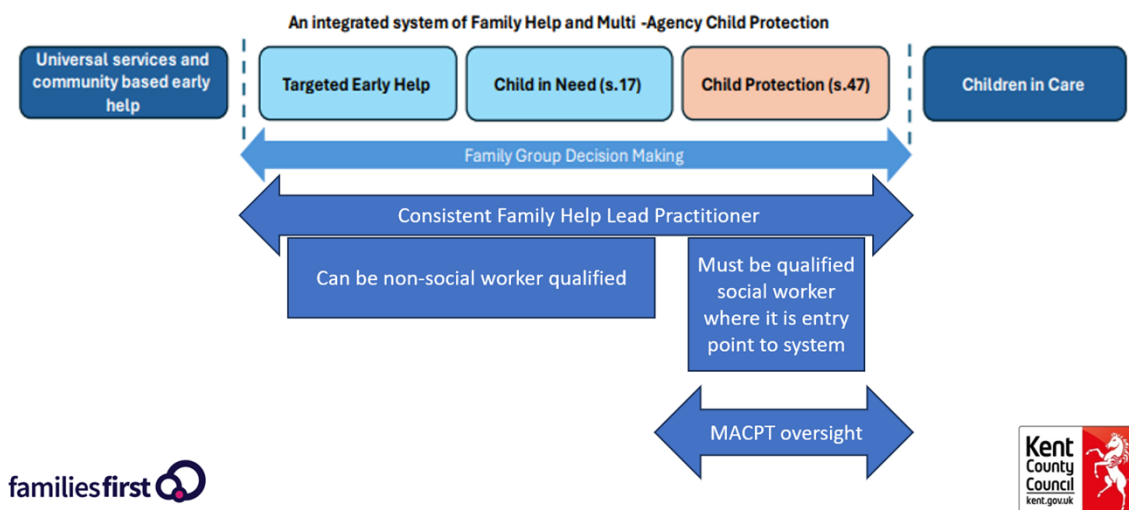
- 1.1 The national government has launched the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme, initially backed by over £500 million of funding for the 2025/26 financial year, including £253m of new ring-fenced funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) known as the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant. This investment is intended to support local authorities and their partners to design and implement end-to-end system reform focused on providing effective early help, family support and child protection services.
- 1.2 This transformation will ensure services are responsive to individual needs and inclusive of the wider support network, with meetings held in accessible and family-preferred venues. Statutory services will become a trusted system that has the best interest of the child at the centre of its work. The stigma often associated with statutory services will be replaced by trust, with families perceiving services as support rather than threat. Family Hubs will serve as an inclusive and accessible community anchors, offering integrated universal and targeted services ensuring smoother transitions as needs change.
- 1.3 The programme will require a shift in our workforce, with roles evolving to empower and equip alternatively qualified practitioners to assess and respond to the needs of children and families. The introduction of Family Help Lead Practitioners would mark a move away from rigid role definitions, instead recognising and valuing a diverse range of skills and experiences. This approach aims to reduce staff turnover, strengthen relationships with families, and enhance the effectiveness of multi-agency collaboration. Kent's strong foundation of partnership working and shared commitment to reform provides a solid platform for change. Any transformation must be co-designed with children, families, and partner agencies, ensuring that the voices of children and families are central to the process. By engaging early and listening throughout, we will shift the system towards prevention, consistency, and improved outcomes, ensuring families stay together, thrive, and feel supported.
- 1.4 The key future changes to the delivery of Children's Services involved in implementing a new Families First Model are expected to be mandated through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which is currently progressing through Parliament. To date, no amendments have been made to the proposed changes to the delivery of children's services outlined in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. All Local Authorities will be required to implement these reforms and are working with the Department for Education on their proposed delivery plans. Formally accepting the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant for 2025/2026, and delegating authority to the Director of Children's Services to allocate the funding, aligns with Priority 4: New Models of Care and Support in Framing Kent's Future – Our Council Strategy 2022–2026, as well as the Securing Kent's Future – Budget Recovery Strategy, which aims to alleviate financial pressures.

2. Key Considerations

- 2.1 The Children's Social Care Prevention Grant 2025/2026 can be used to sustain and enhance existing prevention services for children and families, while also supporting the transformation and implementation of the Families First model. The grant is ring-fenced and the grant money will be spent across the same strands of activity as set out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG):
- Transformation activity
 - Workforce
 - Service delivery
 - Partner agency funding
- 2.2 The Government's commitment to the Families First model has been reconfirmed by the Chancellor's statement to Parliament, which included £555 million over the next 2 years from the Transformation Fund for 2026-27 and 2027-28 for children's social care reform. £523 million provided for the Families First Programme in 2025-26 will continue in each year of the Spending Review period (£523m each year from 2026-27 – 2028-29). There is no indication of how this grant will be split between Local Authorities.
- 2.3 This stage of the process relates to confirming acceptance of the grant and associated conditions, including committing to working towards designing a Kent Families First model and supporting the required transformation activity to move to this when finalised in future years. Approval of the final model will be subject to future governance activity.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Families First Partnership programme was developed 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 on how we help, protect and support children and families.
- 3.2 The infographic below indicates the areas of change required through the national reform to the delivery of Children Service in England.



3.3 Families First Partnership programme's objective was to design and implement a new, end-to-end system for children's social care reform, focusing 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.
- Introducing expert-led, dedicated Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs), including lead child protection practitioners and an expanded parental support offer.
- Providing practical and financial support for family networks throughout the reformed system.

3.4 A successful Families First programme in Kent will deliver:

- A fully integrated, family-centred system of support
- Strong multi-agency collaboration and shared accountability
- Families receiving and accessing the right help at the right time from trusted practitioners who understand their story, coordinating support and providing consistent presence throughout their journey
- Financial sustainability, ensuring that resources are used efficiently to deliver long-term value and improved outcomes

4. Options considered and dismissed, and associated risk

- 4.1 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have already confirmed the Council's Children's Social Care Prevention Grant allocation for 2025/2026. Kent County Council could refuse this funding and return the money to central government.
- 4.2 The implementation of the new Families First Model is currently being debated in Parliament, through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, and is expected to become a legal requirement in the coming months.

Therefore, refusing this funding would mean any costs associated with implementation of the requirements set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill would have to be met solely by the Council's existing budget, creating a financial pressure.

- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 Providing that Kent County Council has spent the grant in accordance with the specified conditions, there is no indication that the Government intends to seek reimbursement in the event of a delay or non-approval of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have confirmed Kent County Council will receive the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant for 2025-26 totalling £6,759,810. The funding was identified in Appendix F within the Medium Term Financial Plan, agreed by County Council in February 2025.
- 5.2 In May 2025, the Government has confirmed this is a ring-fenced grant and issued the associated terms and conditions. The grant determination was for 2025-26 only, with no details regarding how much will be allocated to KCC over the next 2 years. Failure to adhere to the grant conditions and directing the money towards other areas could result in repaying this funding to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
- 5.3 The funding terms and conditions include scope for the deployment of 2025/26 funding to support existing service activity (such as Early Help provision) where it aligns with the Families First Programme. Accordingly, this decision confirms the relevant funding allocations alongside the spend on future model design and transformation preparations.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 The 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.
- 6.2 Acceptance of any grant money does mean that Kent County Council is obligated to comply with the delivery requirements, terms and conditions that accompany the funding. Review of the deliverability and legal considerations will be undertaken and referenced at the point of decision.

7. Equalities implications

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed. At this stage there are no anticipated adverse impacts that are associated with the acceptance of the Families First grant money given the expectation that any future operations and activity will be designed to complement, develop and build on established family support services.

8. Data Protection Implications

- 8.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) is not required for the acceptance spent of the Families First grant money.

9. Other corporate implications

- 9.1 There are no corporate implications linked with accepting the funding.

10. Governance

- 10.1 The Key Decision provides clear strategic direction on the planned approach by the Council – working towards developing an appropriate Families First approach. The decision provides authority for Officers to undertake the required development and design activity during 2025/26, in advance of future decision-making to confirm the Kent Families First Model. The decision also provides delegation to accept and deploy funding provided in future years, providing it is given on the same or very similar terms.
- 10.2 As a condition of the grant requirements, Kent County Council will be required to submit iterative Delivery Plans to Department for Education. These sit at an operational level and represent evidencing to Department for Education the progress in 2025/26 on the development of the future model. These Plans, under this decision, will be completed and submitted by Officers under delegated authority as part of the decision-implementation and do not represent binding commitments or policy decisions.
- 10.3 Accountability for the service delivery sits with the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education. Responsibility for the operational delivery sits with the Director for Integrated Children's Services.
- 10.4 The Families First Programme Board is responsible, at the operational and implementation level, for providing Directorate-level oversight, direction and governance to support the successful delivery of the Families First programme. This will be supported by Workstream Operational Management Groups to oversee the operational delivery of Families First workstreams and projects.
- 10.5 A further Key Decision will be taken in early 2026 to approve the Families First implementation plan for Kent County Council.

11. Conclusions

- 11.1 The decision is required to formalise the acceptance and allocation of the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant, which has already been announced by The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This funding provides a critical opportunity to implement the Families First transformation model, allowing Kent County Council to prepare appropriately for with national reforms in this area, which also align with Kent County Council's existing Kent County Council's strategic objectives for children's services. The Government have indicated grant funding will continue for at least the next two years.
- 11.2 Delegating authority for the implementation activity is crucial for effective and timely progression of the programme. During 2025/26 the Service will work to design and develop the future service model, including relevant co-design activity and the principle of recognising and capturing the voice of the child. Future Strategic decisions remain subject to appropriate governance to approve the long term future model for this service in Kent.

12. Recommendation(s):

That the Cabinet Member consider the following proposal:

The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to **CONSIDER** and **ENDORSE**, or **MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS** to the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services on the proposed decision as set out in the Proposed Record of Decision (PROD).

13. Background Documents

- 13.1 The [Families First Partnership Programme Guide](#) provides information to support safeguarding partners with the implementation of children's social care reforms, including delivery expectations and areas for local flexibility.
- 13.2 The [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) sets out the purpose, principles and enablers of good practice and the outcomes that should be achieved. The guidance describes what everyone working with families should do and helps everyone come together with a clear vision for how to transform the support that families receive.
- 13.3 [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#): gives every practitioner working in a multi-agency system clarity about what is required of them individually and how they need to work in multi-agency partnerships to deliver effective services, support and help to children and their families.

14. Appendices

Appendix A- PROD

Appendix B- EqIA

15. Contact details

Report Author: Jordan Regan

Director: Ingrid Crisan

Families First Programme Manager

Director of Operational Integrated Children's
Services

03000 417317

Jordan.regan@kent.gov.uk

03000 412795

Ingrid.crisan@kent.gov.uk