

People and Health Overview Committee

17 October 2023

The Families First for Children Pathfinder Delivering the Government's Stable Homes, Built on Love Strategy

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Portfolio Holder: Cllr B Quayle, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Paul Dempsey
Job Title: Corporate Director, Care and Protection
Tel: 01305 224513
Email: Paul.dempsey@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

Following a national review of children's social care, the government has written a new strategy '*Stable Homes Built on Love*', with 6 pillars or themes for transformation. Dorset, along with two other local authorities, have been invited to test out an element of this strategy. This paper provides an overview of the approach the council is taking to implementation, outlines the governance and sets out the required tasks and timelines for the programme moving forward.

Recommendation:

1. The People and Health Overview Committee is invited to comment on the approach to the implementation of the national pathfinder and the progress to date.
2. The People and Health Committee recommends to Cabinet that this approach is adopted by the Council.

Reason for Recommendation:

Participation in the Pathfinder programme is a huge opportunity for Dorset to shape the national transformation of children and families strategy and policy and to ensure that Dorset Council is well placed to implement these policy changes when they are rolled out nationally. Department for Education funding will be made available and will be used to support the required change.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care published its final report in May 2022. The Review was described as a “once-in-a-generation opportunity” to set out a bold and broad plan to improve outcomes for children and families. The big question it sought to answer was: How do we ensure children grow up in loving, stable, and safe families and, where that is not possible, that care provides the same foundations?
- 1.2 The review found the current system to be increasingly skewed towards crisis intervention, with outcomes for children unacceptably poor, and costs continuing to rise. It reported that without a ‘radical reset’ of the whole system, outcomes will remain poor, and in a decade’s time the children in care population will have increased from 80,000 to 100,000, and costs will increase to £15billion from £10billion now.
- 1.3 ‘Stable Homes, Built on Love’, published in February 2023, is the Government’s strategy for implementing the recommendations of the Review.
- 1.4 The Strategy sets out six pillars to transform children’s social care. These are as follows:
 - Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families.
 - A decisive multi-agency child protection system.
 - Unlocking the potential of family networks.
 - Putting love, relationships, and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care.
 - A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one.

- A system that continuously learns and improves and makes better use of evidence and data.
- 1.5 The Government is sponsoring several test and learn pathfinder programmes to test out delivery of some elements of its strategy before they roll it out nationally. Dorset is one of three local authorities nationally who have been selected to deliver the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme.
- 1.6 This Pathfinder involves designing a new model of provision to deliver the following elements of the strategy:
- **Family Help:** The establishment of locally based multi-disciplinary Family Help teams that work collaboratively with partners to provide intensive, non-stigmatising and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families.
 - **Child Protection:** A child protection response led by social workers with greater expertise and experience working as part of a dedicated multi-agency child protection team. These child protection lead practitioners will work alongside family help to protect children who are suffering or are likely to suffer significant harm.
 - **Family Networks:** Participating local areas will make greater use of family networks, with earlier use of family group decision making throughout Family Help and Child Protection systems, facilitated by targeted funding to enable more children to live at home or support a transition into kinship care.
 - **Safeguarding Partners:** Local statutory safeguarding partners will be fully engaged in the operate with clear roles and responsibilities for statutory safeguarding partners at both a strategic and an operational level, and with an increased and possibly statutory role for education.
- 1.7 In summary, the ambitions of the Pathfinder are to deliver:
- Deeper integration and partnerships in child protection and family help.
 - More support and help to families early, preventing crisis.
 - Support to enable families and family networks to make their own decisions and plans to keep children safe.
 - An enhanced safeguarding role for education at the strategic level.

2 Progress since June 2023

- 2.1 When we reported to this Committee in June the paper was exempt from the public as the Department for Education (DfE) had not announced our involvement nationally at that stage. Subsequently, on 26th July, the DfE announced that Dorset, Lincolnshire, and Wolverhampton had been selected as Pathfinders for Families First for Children
- 2.2 We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding setting out how we will work with the DfE on the programme, and we have received an initial £200,000 seed funding.
- 2.3 A delivery partner, a partnership of Mutual Ventures and Innovation Unit, have been identified to work alongside us to support us to deliver the programme and develop a community of learning and practice across pathfinder sites nationally.
- 2.4 We have mapped our current model of provision against the minimum requirements set by the DfE in the pathfinder design specification. We have also drafted a plan for how we will co-design our new model of provision. Both documents have been submitted to the DfE.
- 2.5 We have submitted an initial costed plan to the DfE setting out how much additional funding we need to deliver our new model and what this will be spent on. This costed plan will change iteratively as we co-design our model and will be formally agreed towards the end of October. We do know that the grant funding available for us is up to £1.8m in 2023/24 and up to £2.5m in 2024/25. This is in addition to the £200k we have already received. Our costed plan requests the full £4.3m. However, we have stated to the DfE that this full amount is not sufficient to do all that we want to do to deliver a full model of provision.
- 2.6 We have established a Families First for Children Programme Board. This is chaired by Theresa Leavy (Executive Director – People Children), and includes representatives from across the partnership, the voluntary and community sector, with Ofsted and the DfE on the extended membership as observers. The first meeting was on 7th September and this meeting went well.
- 2.7 We have set up the necessary structures to undertake our co-design work and have clarified the scope of the work we will need to undertake. In many areas, our local conditions for success are already meeting the DfE minimum requirements. In addition to the DfE requirements, we have also set our own ‘must have’ elements for our model. The co-design work will look at how to deliver the set requirements/elements and how we should

shape our model where we have some flexibilities. Co-design with children and families will be based on feedback we have collected previously, engagement activity ongoing currently, and commencement of new engagement activity where we have gaps in our knowledge/feedback.

- 2.8 Our partners are well briefed and engaged on the background, purpose, and scope of the work. The next stage will be to get into the finer detail of what the proposed changes mean in practice.
- 2.9 The co-design period will run from mid-September to the end of October. The final deliverable for the co-design period will be a fully costed model and implementation plan. There is an expectation that implementation will commence from end of November 2023.
- 2.10 The wider portfolio of children's transformation work will now be consolidated into the Pathfinder programme.

3 Financial implications

- 3.1 Participation in the Pathfinder presents an opportunity to secure a level of DfE funding to undertake the change and development work required that is unlikely to be available for other authorities once the Pathfinder programme has finished.
- 3.2 The initial costed plan that was submitted to the DfE includes high level detail of how we intend to use the grant funding to deliver the pathfinder reforms. This plan can and will change during co-design but is likely to include the following categories of spend:
 - Seconding/backfilling roles in police/health to support development of the programme and deeper integration.
 - New/additional roles in the Multi-Agency Family Help and Child Protection spaces (examples include, family help workers, youth practitioners, advanced practitioners)
 - Programme management roles
 - Enhancements to the learning and development offer for staff in line with the new model
 - Commissioning services differently (e.g., in the early support space)

- 3.3 The maximum funding we have been advised we will receive is not sufficient to deliver all the reforms as stated in the DfE design specification. Therefore, the submission of the costed plan included commentary to this effect.
- 3.4 The grant funding allocation runs to the end of 2024/25, and we have costed up to this point. It is our expectation that there will be an uplift to the settlement for Children's Services in Dorset and nationally for 2025/26 and beyond to account for the costs of delivering the Government's Strategy thereafter.

4 Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

- 4.1 There are no implications for the environment, climate, and ecology other than that there may be benefits that may arise from a reduction in cross country travel if this strategy is successful in creating more local care placements for Dorset and for other authorities around the country.

5 Well-being and Health Implications

- 5.1 The aim of the Government Strategy is to improve the lives, and the health and wellbeing of children, young people, and families. Successful delivery of the strategy in Dorset will bring improvements to the health and wellbeing of our children, families, and communities.

6. Other Implications

- 6.1 Participation in the Pathfinder will put Dorset on the national stage, leading the implementation of a national strategy and with a responsibility and an expectation that we will thereafter support others on their own implementation journey.
- 6.2 There will be implications for some of our staff who may experience a change to their role, but we will not know exactly how this will look until we have completed our co-design work.

7 Risk Assessment

- 7.7 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low
Residual Risk: Low

8 Equalities Impact Assessment

- 8.1 Successful implementation of the Government Strategy will improve the lives of the most vulnerable children and families in our communities.
- 8.2 We will be undertaking an Equalities Impact Assessment on any potential changes.

Appendices/Background Papers

Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Available at [Children's social care: stable homes, built on love - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/611212/Childrens_social_care_stable_homes_built_on_love_-_GOV.UK.pdf)