

# People and Health Overview Committee

## 6 February 2024

### Families First for Children Pathfinder Update

#### For Review and Consultation

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

**Local Councillor(s):** All

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

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**Report Status:** Public

#### **Brief Summary:**

This report is an update to the People and Health Overview Committee on Children's Services involvement with the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme. It provides an update on progress with a focus on the implementation plan for the Pathfinder.

#### **Recommendation:**

It is recommended that members note the contents of the report and support our on-going participation in the Families First for Children Pathfinder programme.

#### **Reason for Recommendation:**

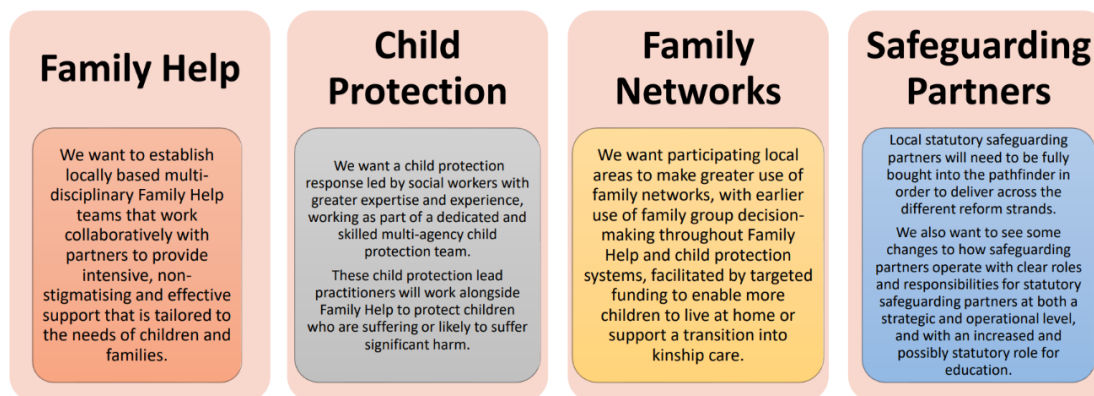
Participation in the Pathfinder programme is a huge opportunity for Dorset to shape the transformation that is required in children's social care, to secure DfE funding to support the required change, and for our children and families to benefit from the reforms sooner rather than later.

## 1. Report

- 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. This Pathfinder involves designing a new model of provision to deliver the following elements of the strategy:

There are **four key reform strands** to the Families First for Children pathfinder that will be delivered as a whole system transformation. There will be minimum requirements alongside local flexibility and delivery questions to be worked through via co-design.



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

1.6 From August – December 2023 we undertook a co-design process to agree our proposed delivery model for the pathfinder reforms. This exercise was carried out in collaboration with Children’s Services staff, the wider council, and partnership colleagues. The model has also been built in line with the views and lived experience of our children, young people, and families.

1.7 Our delivery plan was submitted to the Department for Education in December 2023. This has now been agreed subject to some final policy clarifications.

## 2. Overview of our Families First for Children Pathfinder Model

2.1 In our co-design work, we established a set of key principles we felt should inform our model, as follows:

**2.1.1 Putting our Children and Families First** – we will continue to take a whole family approach to our work with children and families and will put their experience of our services and the improvement of their outcomes at the centre of everything we do.

**2.1.2 Maintaining our strengths.** We have been careful to make sure that the design of our pathfinder model builds on and enhances our strengths, rather than losing any of the things we do well.

**2.1.3 Enhancement and growth.** The model is about enhancing the way we operate and builds on the strengths of our current model. It extends and expands on our integration with partners and provides additional capacity to support children and families as soon as they need it.

**2.1.4 Developing our workforce for the future.** As one of the first pathfinders, we are in a unique position to develop our workforce for the future system which will be built on the ambitions of the pathfinder and new central government policy.

2.2 The enhancements to our delivery model are structured around the four key reform strands in the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme: Multi-disciplinary Family Help Services, Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams, Unlocking the Potential of Wider Family Networks & Safeguarding Partners. Key elements of our model are set out below:

2.3 **Family Help:**

2.3.1 **We will increase integration in our conversation based front door, which currently includes** our Children’s Advice and Duty (ChAD) Service, our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), and our Family Help Hub, by adding the Dorset Education Advice Line (inclusive of the Educational Psychology consultation service), and the CAHMS Gateway.

2.3.2 **We will enhance early support commissioning,** bolstering the Voluntary and Community Sector offer to deliver earlier, preventative support to children, young people, and families in their communities.

2.3.3 **We will merge Early Help and Child in Need (CIN) work** into a single offer called Family Help. The majority of what we currently call CIN work will be held in this Family Help Service. All

families/cases supported in this space will benefit from oversight from qualified social work staff.

**2.3.4 We will enhance and grow our locality Family Help and Inclusion & Belonging teams.** These teams will provide Family Help that is overseen by qualified social workers. Our Inclusion and Belonging Teams will include a range of professionals from different disciplines including educational psychologists, specialist teachers, targeted youth workers, special educational needs provision leads, and provide greater support to families and work in partnership with Family Help Teams.

**2.3.5 Family Help Lead Practitioners** are those professionals identified as the lead worker allocated to a family receiving family help services. The Lead Practitioner could be a professional from any discipline and any agency working with the family, for example a health visitor, school nurse, or a Family Help Team worker, depending on which professional is best placed to support the family and undertake that role.

## **2.4 Child Protection:**

**2.4.1 We will establish Multi Agency Child Protection Teams** which will include a range of different practitioners including Health (Drug and Alcohol Misuse, Domestic Abuse and Mental Health Practitioners) policing colleagues, our wider partners, and our most experienced social workers, who will be the Lead Child Protection Practitioners.

**2.4.2 We will establish Lead Child Protection Practitioners** to sit in our Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams. This is a defined role set out in the DfE Families First for Children requirements. Our experienced social workers will undertake this role. These practitioners will have low caseloads to ensure the role is attractive and that they have capacity to use their skills, experience, and expertise to safely lead child protection work and provide support and guidance to professional colleagues. Lead Child Protection Practitioners will work closely with the Family Help Lead Practitioner where appropriate.

2.4.3 **We will enhance advocacy for families going through Child Protection Processes** to ensure they understand the process, are well prepared, do not feel stigmatised, and are supported to have their voice heard.

2.4.4 **We will test a new model for Child Protection Case Conferences**, with new roles for social workers and Quality Assurance Reviewing Officers (QARO's)

## 2.5 **Family Networks:**

2.5.1 **Families will be offered Family Group Conferencing** in child protection by default. These are a family-led meetings in which the family and friends network come together to make a plan for a child.

2.5.2 **Families will be offered Family Network Meetings** in Family Help. Again, these are family led meetings and will support the family to develop their plan.

2.5.3 Families who have had a Family Network Meeting or Family Group conference **may be able to access a Family Network Support Package**. These packages will provide practical and / or financial support to the wider family network to enable children to live and thrive at home.

2.5.4 **We are developing a local Family Network/Kinship Care Strategy** that will embed a kinship care / families first approach.

2.5.5 **We will develop a dedicated Connected Persons Service**, bringing together assessment and support for Connected Persons Foster Carers, Special Guardians, kinship carers caring for children subject to Child Arrangement Orders, and Private Foster Carers.

## 2.6 **Safeguarding Partners and overall system design:**

2.6.1 **We will develop a single whole family assessment and plan** so that families only have to tell their story once, that is family led and that can be the foundation for the identification of further needs or specialist assessments if required.

2.6.2 **Our practice framework** will be strengthened, and we will continue to expand and embed the principles of Motivational Interviewing, Therapeutic Thinking, and Trauma Informed and Restorative & Relational Based Practice across the whole children's workforce and the partnership.

2.6.3 **We will undertake an efficiency review** of our key partnership forums and governance to streamlining wherever possible.

2.6.4 **Practice leads** will be established to support with practice changes and to sustain quality of practice and application of legislative changes.

2.6.5 We will strengthen the role of Education as a safeguarding partner by including our Education Director as a member of our safeguarding partnership and identifying nominated education professionals to sit on our safeguarding partnership subgroups.

### 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 Our final costed plan that was submitted to the DfE includes detail of how we intend to use the grant funding to deliver the Pathfinder reforms and includes:

- 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 total funding we will receive for the programme is **£4,897,346**

- 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 puts 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 a reshape of some existing roles within our locality structures, predominantly a change in portfolio responsibility. However, we do not anticipate any significant contractual changes.

#### 7. **Risk Assessment**

- 7.1 **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 An EQIA in draft status in relation to the workforce planning element of the reforms. It has been reviewed and agreed by HR and is now with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer for final review and agreement.



8.2 A full EQIA for the programme will be completed ahead of the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2024 if needed.

9. **Appendices**

9.1 Appendix 1: FFCP Delivery Plan

10. **Background Papers**

[Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation](#)

[Working together updated guidance](#)

[National social care strategy](#)

[Kinship care national strategy](#)

[Digital and data strategy](#)