

Report title	Families First for Children Pathfinder Implementation	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Chris Burden Children & Young People	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Alison Hinds, Director of Children's Services	
Originating service	Children's Services	
Accountable employee	Rachel King	Deputy Director for the Families First for Children Pathfinder
	Tel	01902 555955
	Email	Rachel.king@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Children's Social Care Leadership	9 November 2023
	Senior Executive Board	14 November 2023
	Cabinet Member briefing Children & Young People	17 November 2023
	Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel	22 November 2023

Recommendation for decision:

That Cabinet approves:

1. The high-level Wolverhampton Families First for Children Pathfinder Implementation Plan.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the progress made with our participation of Children's Services in the Stable Homes, Built on Love, Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme (FFCP).
- 1.2 To provide an overview of the reforms to be delivered and seek approval for the proposed FFCP Implementation Plan as outlined below.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The FFCP is a key commitment made to implementing reforms outlined in the Department for Education's (DfE) *Stable Homes, Built on Love* in February 2023 strategy.
- 2.2 Wolverhampton along with Lincolnshire and Dorset Councils were approached by the DfE to be one of the three wave one local authorities for the FFCP. This is cited in the Background Paper.
- 2.3 DfE have structured the programme delivery in phases. Phase 1 is a test and learn phase, which will run until March 2025. This will involve implementing a locally agreed, co-designed model to address the reform areas in family help, child protection, family networks and establishing education as a fourth statutory partner. The local model is to be informed and shaped by the DfE minimum expectations outlined in the FFCP design specification.
- 2.4 Since July 2023 when the pathfinder was officially launched, we have worked closely with the DfE and the appointed delivery partner, Mutual Ventures. Workstreams comprising of local authority and partner managers have jointly been developing solutions to effectively respond to implementing the reform areas. Co-production has been key in informing the model through input gathered from staff, parent/carers and young people.
- 2.5 Governance has comprised of a partnership programme board and steering group to support key decisions and sign off the model ahead of implementation in the new year.
- 2.6 The pathfinder will meet the vision agreed with partners that have helped shape our service response to the reforms. We will:
 - Ensure the right support at the right time and place reducing the need for statutory intervention wherever possible.
 - Ensure children and families are supported by skilled experienced professionals in a relationship led approach.
 - Build resilience in families and communities through promoting family led planning.

3.0 Progress made Families First for Children's Pathfinder (FFCP)

- 3.1 Below summarises the main reform areas identified in the DfE Design Specification as minimum requirements to inform the service delivery model.
- 3.2 Against each is the local response co-designed with partners. Staff, parent/carer, children and young people reference groups views have also shaped the model.
- 3.3 During the implementation phase of the pathfinder, progress will be regularly shared with Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel.
- 3.4 The reform areas of Family Help, Child Protection, Family Networks and Safeguarding Partners with the local response through enhancing our current services and provision:

Family Help reforms.

- 3.5 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. Incorporating a 'front door' and service that is welcoming, effectively identifies families' strengths and needs and decides on the appropriate practitioner for a family. Support reforms by reviewing thresholds and create a family help assessment that feeds into a family help plan. Agree how teams will case manage, provide oversight and have appropriate supervision.

Family Help responses to inform the FFCP model:

- 3.6 One assessment and one family led plan will be our approach with a view to families only having to tell their story once. Documentation and process to effectively deliver this is yet to be finalised.
- 3.7 Building on our strong partnership working relationships we will develop the Family Help Lead Practitioner (FHLP) role and there will be a focus on upskilling the workforce across the wider partnership to be able to take on the role of the FHLP.
- 3.8 For several years our targeted early help teams have been co-located with Child in Need/ Child Protection social work teams, along with health visitors and the police, in eight Strengthening Family Hubs across the city. More recently the Family Hub approach has been launched within these eight hubs aimed at providing early support to parents and carers so they are able to nurture their babies and children, improving health and education outcomes for all.
- 3.9 The FFCP provides further opportunity to enhance the support to families through integration with the Family Hubs. The FFCP will test the feasibility for integrating other services that we feel are critical to provide help at the earliest opportunity and ensuring that we provide the right support by the right lead professional. It is recognised that dependent up the level of risk and harm, the FHLP may not be a Social Worker.
- 3.10 In addition to partners already co-located across our Family Hubs, the co-design work has identified a number of additional organisations who would enhance family help. This

includes domestic abuse leads, substance misuse workers, emotional wellbeing workers and targeted youth support.

- 3.11 Discussions are underway with partners and commissioned services to move towards a model where the identified organisations are represented and embedded within the family help space.
- 3.12 There will be a commitment to trying to keep the FHLP consistent where possible for the family however, where family needs change the lead practitioner may also change. In such cases this will be managed sensitively with families through a clear handover process.
- 3.13 For families not led by a qualified Social Worker the Senior Social Worker in the team will have a level of oversight of all children open to the team. The threshold application will be applied where it is clear needs have escalated to an extent that requires a qualified Social Worker. There will be investment in workforce development to ensure all practitioners have the necessary skills to be a FHLP, with restorative practice and trauma informed practice being the underpinning approaches to the family help model.

Child Protection reforms.

- 3.14 A child protection response led by Lead Child Protection Practitioners (LCPP). Clearly defining the role and working as part of a dedicated and skilled multi-agency child protection team (MACPT) to work alongside Family Help to protect children who are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. Improving parents' experiences and engagement with child protection, including through independent parental representation.

Child Protection responses to inform the FFCP model:

Role of The Lead Child Protection Practitioner

- 3.15 Wolverhampton had already established the LCPP role prior to the pathfinder, with successful recruitment to some of these posts already completed. The LCPP will be a qualified Social Worker with significant demonstrable knowledge and experience to act as a recognised expert in the field of child protection. The role will:
 - Provide child protection advice across the service including to Family Help
 - Lead all statutory child protection functions.
 - Hold a caseload.
 - Co-work with Family Help Lead Practitioners use experts from other agencies from within FH team to achieve best outcomes for children.
 - Work as part of the MACPT.
 - Identify a FHLP at earliest opportunity child protection planning.

Multi agency Child Protection Teams

- 3.16 Wolverhampton Children's Social Care already has a well-established Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub that operates 24 hours a day, (MASH24) and Child Assessment Team (CAT) who respond to all new incoming requests for support, initial social work assessment and child protection enquiries.
- 3.17 The MACPT will build on this structure to strengthen the response to child protection work across the whole system. MASH24 is an integrated team of professionals from a range of agencies (listed below) who are co-located operating according to the Wolverhampton Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub hosting arrangements.
- Police
 - Health [The Royal Wolverhampton Trust, Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust & Integrated Care Board]
 - Education
 - Housing
 - Adult Social Care
 - Probation
 - Early Help
 - Substance misuse Services
 - Children's Social Care
- 3.18 Negotiations are underway to change the use of existing police resource in the Central Referral Unit [CRU, servicing six other LA's] to ensure a timely response to children open to Family Help or Children and Young People in Care (CYPIC), where a strategy discussion is required.
- 3.19 The established child protection Pediatrician Consultancy role will continue to be used to support the development of child protection work within the FFCP.
- 3.20 Information sharing protocols are well embedded in MASH24 and CATs, this will provide a sound basis for rolling out the MACPT.
- 3.21 The consultancy and advisory role of the MACPT will build confidence within the Family Help space and across the wider partnership to ensure thresholds are appropriately applied, risk to children is responded to in a timely way and where safe to do so, the least level of intervention is applied.

Child Protection conferences

- 3.22 In agreement with DfE colleagues and partner local authorities, the chairing of child protection conferences will remain as it is with an independent chair. However,

throughout the test and learn phase opportunities will be sought to test the feasibility of the LCPP chairing child protection conferences for children.

- 3.23 Wolverhampton currently has a core team facilitating Family Group Conferencing support and Family Meetings. The intention is to significantly expand this offer and in doing so, support families to identify suitable members within their family network who can support them throughout the child protection process. A key consideration in utilising the family network at child protection conferences is to ensure this is done safely and that families are still able to access an independent level of support via advocacy.
- 3.24 We will build on the advocacy currently offered within the child protection space for parents with learning disabilities and build as a package through mentoring, peer support and through a commissioned service.

Family networks reforms.

- 3.25 Participating local areas to 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.

Family Networks response to inform the model:

Family group decision making

- 3.26 DfE mandated 25% of the £1.9 million grant be used on Family Networks, 25% of which is to fund support and packages. This will allow us to extend the existing Family Group Conferencing offer and encourage supporting families more creatively to enable children to remain with their birth family where safe to do so.
- 3.27 Every family will receive the offer of a Family Group Decision Maker (FGDM) alongside allocation of a lead practitioner as part of our Family Help and Child Protection offer. There will be a two-tier approach for FGDM support which will include our current Wolverhampton model of 'Families Working Together' alongside a more structured approach of Family Group Conferencing.
- 3.28 Our successful 'Families Working Together' approach will be widely used across Family Help and the FGC model will be offered to the families within the court arena, both models will enable the families to have private family time as well as development of their own family plan.

Plan for delivering family group decision making and family network support packages including workforce considerations.

- 3.29 In order to offer FGDM support to all families it will require an increase in staffing. However, this can be achieved by building and enhancing Wolverhampton's current 'Working together with Families' team. Staffing and management numbers are still being worked through.

- 3.30 It is proposed that the team will be managed outside of Family Help / MACPT in order to provide a level of independence.
- 3.31 The dedicated budget to support the Family Networks pillar will also enable creative and bespoke Family Network Support packages (FNSP). Such packages will be provided, where necessary, in order to promote sustainable family led planning and support.

Safeguarding partners reforms.

- 3.32 Changes to how safeguarding partners operate with clear roles and responsibilities for statutory safeguarding partners at both a strategic and operational level, and an increased and possibly statutory role for education.

Safeguarding partners response to inform the model:

- 3.33 As a city there is a commitment to education being represented at every level, from early years through to higher education, within the safeguarding partnership. There is already a very active Education Providers group that meets regularly as a subgroup of the local safeguarding partnership. The proposed changes as part of FFCP will build upon this.
- 3.34 Service leads from education within the local authority have been working with colleagues in the education sector, exploring what it would mean for education to become the fourth statutory partner joining the LA, police, and health.
- 3.35 It has been acknowledged that within the current structure, there is not sufficient strategic capacity to represent the education sector in its broadest sense within the safeguarding partnership. Therefore, additional resource is required to lead the FFCP and act as the conduit between education provisions across the city. As a result of this a draft job description has been designed and is currently being reviewed by the Education Providers Safeguarding group and being graded through the Council's job evaluation process.
- 3.36 Operationally there still needs to be work done to agree where education specialism and additionality can be provided across the system. For example, work is underway to integrate Education Welfare Officers into the Family Help offer.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 As part of the pathfinder, the DfE has produced a design specification, with key minimum expectations for each area of the reform. The model presented is in line with the DfE requirements.
- 4.2 Throughout the codesign process alternative options were considered. The model has been informed by a detailed Needs Analysis and demographic and performance data.
- 4.3 Input has been gained from a range of services that have been working closely, as well as the other two Pathfinder Local Authorities to ensure similar responses to the reform areas whilst building on 'what works well' for Wolverhampton.

4.4 Staff, parent/carer, children, and young people reference groups have been key in responding to the proposed model during the co-design phase. Their feedback has shaped our approach and processes.

5.0 Reasons for decisions

5.1 It is important that the service retains well performing areas and maximises positive outcomes for our residents. This was a key factor considered when designing the model and focused on enhancing current provision and services. The above will be tested and learning will allow to fine tune the model through the next phase, minimising risk and negative impact to services and residents.

6.0 Financial implications

6.1 There is currently approval in 2023-2024 to build in a supplementary budget up to the indicative total funding allocation of £1.9 million, fully funded by the FFCP grant as detailed within this report. The costs of the programme in 2023-2024 can be met from this approved budget.

6.2 The DfE have required financial plans to be submitted and approved, and will require regular expenditure reports going forward. The expenditure will also be monitored internally to ensure it complies with grant conditions. The indicative allocation for 2024-2025 is £2.5 million.

[JB/09112023/A]

7.0 Legal implications

7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.
[TC/09112023/B]

8.0 Equalities implications

8.1 Considering equalities is a mandatory requirement. The pathfinder programme is an opportunity for the Council to deliver its services to families in a different way, emphasising the need for family help to be responsive and delivered at the earliest opportunity, removing barriers, and improving accessibility to all services. A key feature of the pathfinder programme has been the co-production of service delivery with children, young people, and their families. As part of this the Equalities Impact Assessment has been started by engaging, listening and responding to lived experience of children, young people and families. This will continue to form a pivotal part of future service delivery in our city and influence national reform.

8.2 25 families have been involved in co-producing the plan with wide ranging experience of the social care system their feedback focused on these areas:

- Communication and language needs to be clear and understandable.
- Clear process of support.

- Building on current resource and knowledge for professionals.
- Keeping information simple.

8.3 Feedback has influenced the language and practice approach, particularly in assessments to ensure the child is at the centre and their voice is clearly represented in the resulting plan. An overview of feedback includes:

- Feel the language in shared documents should be 'family friendly' and focused on the family not on 'us' as a service.
- Prefer the terms 'Family Plan' (instead of Part 1 assessment) and Family Help Plan (instead of Part 2 assessment).
- Want the flexibility to review their family plan with other members of their family instead of just with the parent/carer able to attend the review meeting.
- Would like to have clarity about what is to be achieved on their family help journey and by when.

8.4 As the model is further developed and details finalised the EIA work will continue to monitor any potential impacts, intended or unintended, on specific groups.

9.0 All other implications

9.1 The human resources implications, including the job evaluation of new posts and all recruitment activities will be dealt with in line the Council's policies.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 Children's Social Care National Reform - Cabinet, 24 May 2023.

11.0 Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1 - Children's Social Care National Reform - Cabinet, 24 May 2023.