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| <b>CITY OF<br/>WOLVERHAMPTON<br/>COUNCIL</b> | <b>Cabinet</b><br><b>24 May 2023</b> |
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| <b>Report title</b>                            | Children's Social Care National Reform                          |                                         |
| <b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b> | Councillor Chris Burden<br>Children, Young People and Education |                                         |
| <b>Key decision</b>                            | Yes                                                             |                                         |
| <b>In forward plan</b>                         | Yes                                                             |                                         |
| <b>Wards affected</b>                          | All Wards                                                       |                                         |
| <b>Accountable Director</b>                    | Emma Bennett, Executive Director for Families                   |                                         |
| <b>Originating service</b>                     | Children's Services                                             |                                         |
| <b>Accountable employee</b>                    | Alison Hinds                                                    | Deputy Director, Children's Social Care |
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| <b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>     | Strategic Executive Board                                       | 16 May 2023                             |

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**Recommendations for decision:**

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Endorse the participation of Wolverhampton's Children's Services in the Department for Education (DfE) Stable Homes, Built on Love: Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme
2. Approve delegation for approving the Memorandum of Understanding, spending of grant funding and agree to paying any grants to third parties should they be required to the Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital and the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education in consultation with the Executive Director for Families and the Director of Finance.

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet endorsement for the participation of Children' Services in the Stable Homes, Built on Love, Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 In May 2022, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (Care Review) published its final report, calling for bold reforms across the whole of the children's social care system. In the same month The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) published *Child Protection in England* - a national review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson. The Care Review made radical recommendations on how we improve support for children and their families throughout the early help system and children's social care, including kinship care, and both the Care Review and the Panel made major recommendations for Child Protection and Safeguarding Partners.
- 2.2 The Government published *Stable Homes, Built on Love* in February 2023 - an implementation strategy and consultation to respond to the national reviews. This sets out the plans to transform children's social care.
- 2.3 The Families First for Children pathfinder is a key commitment made in the strategy.
- 2.4 Wolverhampton has been approached by the DfE to be one of three wave one local authorities for the Families First for Children pathfinder programme. As one of 10 local authorities that the Independent Care Review team worked with, Wolverhampton children's services were able to showcase some of the innovative ways we work with children and their families. This, alongside our strong good practice as inspected by Ofsted in 2002, demonstrates that Wolverhampton is in a strong position to work alongside the DfE to undertake a test and learn programme which will influence future national reform in children's social care.
- 2.5 The Families First for Children pathfinder is the delivery mechanism for implementing some of the most significant reforms to family help, child protection, kinship care and safeguarding partners. The programme will launch officially in September 2023 and the first phase will run until March 2025. The DfE will work with three local authority areas in wave one, and up to a further nine in wave two to deliver end-to-end service reform. Ahead of the launch the details of reforms will be developed with the key partners in wave one local areas through a period of codesign and following this the programme will continue to adapt through a test-and-learn approach to best understand how reforms can be delivered. It is the intention of the DfE that wave one and wave two local areas provide a vision of the future system and inform any future stages of the pathfinder.
- 2.6 There are four key reform strands to the Families First for Children pathfinder which 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. An overview of the four reform strands is set out below.

**Family Help.** Establish 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.** Establish a child protection response led by social workers with greater expertise and experience, working as part of a dedicated and skilled multi-agency child protection team. The child protection lead practitioners will work alongside Family Help to protect children who are suffering or 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 need to be fully bought into the pathfinder to deliver across the different reform strands. Exploration to changes to how safeguarding partners operate with clear roles and responsibilities for statutory safeguarding partners at both a strategic and operational level, and with an increased and possibly statutory role for education.

- 2.7 There are two options to consider. Option one is to refuse and not take part in this opportunity as a wave one authority. Option two is to agree to be a wave one local authority and participate in the programme.

### **3.0 Evaluation of alternative options**

- 3.1 Having met with the DfE and discussed the aims of the Families First for Children programme, Children's Services would wish to be a wave one local authority (option two).

### **4.0 Reasons for decision(s)**

- 4.1 This is an exciting opportunity for CWC to participate in a national 'test and learn' approach to help answer some of the challenging questions about how to operationalise, integrate and embed reforms, to develop evidence about specific new ways of working, at a smaller scale, before the next stage of delivery, to inform future revisions of the statutory framework (including *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*), to contribute to evaluation evidence on implementation, delivery, and any emerging impacts, including any barriers, facilitators, and unintended consequences, to contribute to the understanding of implementation costs, and to bring the key partners in our local area on the reform journey, creating sector champions.
- 4.2 Our most recent Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Social Care Services rated children's services as good overall, with outstanding leadership and management. This position, alongside our evidence-based improvement through transformation, lends itself to positive participation in such an important development of national reform. As a service that has a strong restorative base to practice, the Families First for Children Pathfinder programme will support our model of working with families to strengthen opportunities for children to remain cared for within their family network. The model also compliments the

work that is being progressed on delivery of a good Start for Life offer through a Family Hub model. The senior leadership team welcome this opportunity and believe that this is a unique opportunity to influence future national reform.

- 4.3 The detail of the three wave one authorities is embargoed. Local communication activity will be aligned to national announcements.

## **5.0 Financial implications**

- 5.1 It is currently assumed that the Families First Pathfinder Programme will be fully funded by a government grant, and indications are that this will be in the region of £1.8 million for year 1. The final grant allocation and cost of activities within the programme are yet to be determined, and once the grant funding is confirmed the appropriate governance process will be followed to secure approval for the required supplementary budgets. The project will therefore not incur expenditure until these supplementary budgets are approved via Individual Executive Decision Notice. It is also assumed that no match funding will be required from Council budgets, however, should this change further reports to Cabinet may be required.  
[JB/16052023/L]

## **6.0 Legal implications**

- 6.1 There are no legal implications.  
[SB/15052023/A]

## **7.0 Equalities implications**

- 7.1 Considering equalities is a mandatory requirement. An equality analysis has been completed. The pathfinder programme is an opportunity for CWC 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 will be the co-production of service delivery with children young people and their families. Listening and responding to lived experience of children young people and families will continue to form a pivotal part of future service delivery in our city and influence national reform.

## **8.0 All other implications**

- 8.1 There will be Human Resource implications as this programme will require additional staff resource to lead and develop the programme.

## **9.0 Schedule of background papers**

- 9.1 There are no background papers.