

<b>Report title</b>	Families First for Children Pathfinder Update	
<b>Decision designation</b>	RED	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Chris Burden Children & Young People	
<b>Key decision</b>	Yes	
<b>In forward plan</b>	No	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards	
<b>Accountable Director</b>	Alison Hinds, Director of Children's Services	
<b>Originating service</b>	Children's Services	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Alison Hinds Tel Email	Director of Children's Services 01902 553035 Alison.hinds@wolverhampton.gov.uk
<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Children Social Care Leadership	12 October 2023

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**Recommendation for decision:**

That Cabinet recommends that Council approves:

1. The creation of a Deputy Director for Families First post with immediate effect to strategically lead the implementation and delivery of the Families First Programme. The post will be fully funded by grant from the Department for Education.

**Recommendations to noting:**

That Cabinet notes:

1. The progress made with our participation in the Department for Education (DfE) Stable Homes, Built on Love: Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme (FFCP).
2. That the new delivery model will be presented to Cabinet in November and Full Council in December 2023.

## 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 confirm that a further update on the new delivery model will be presented to Cabinet in November and Full Council in December 2023.
- 1.3 To seek approval for the creation of a Deputy Director for Families First post within Children's Services to develop and implement the 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 along with Lincolnshire and Dorset Councils were approached by the DfE to be one of the three wave one local authorities for the Families First for Children pathfinder programme.
- 2.5 The programme is the delivery mechanism for implementing some of the most significant reforms to family help, child protection, kinship care and the safeguarding partnership. Children's services along with statutory partners and children and young people and their parents and carers have been co-designing a proposed service delivery model which will be adapted through a test and learn approach. This will provide the basis to better understand how the reforms can be delivered and influence future policy and national reform.
- 2.6 The first phase of the programme began in July 2023 and will run until March 2025. As is set out later in the report in section 6, financial implications, the DfE is providing grant to support the pathfinder programme.
- 2.7 While we continue our co-design phase it is clear that there is a requirement to have a strategic lead entirely focused on the Programme. There needs to be consistent leadership and oversight, with representation at a national level, leading and managing

implementing the required changes in line with the DfE Service Specification to deliver the policy intent.

- 2.8 The other two Pathfinder local authorities have committed Director level leads to head the programme delivery.

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

- 3.1 The City of Wolverhampton Children's Services has worked alongside the DfE and the delivery partner, Mutual Ventures, to agree the scope of the requirements of the programme.
- 3.2 Since the beginning of September 2023, the focus has been on working with the wider partnership to co-design the delivery model in all areas of delivery: family help, child protection, family networks and establishing education as a fourth statutory partner. The proposed model will be drafted and considered by the Programme Board at the end of October 2023 .
- 3.3 It is proposed to create a Deputy Director for Families First to lead on this Council priority, the Deputy Director will report to the Director of Children's Services, this will ensure we have strategic capacity to deliver the programme whilst ensuring the proposed model aligns with the Council and Children's services vision.
- 3.4 The Deputy Director for Families First will be a fixed term position until March 2025 in line with the external funding received for this programme and will be recruited to in line with Human Resource policies.

### **4.0 Evaluation of alternative options**

- 4.1 Initially the Programme has been led by a Head of Service while retaining their substantive role. This has proved difficult to balance due to the range of reforms required across the system within the timescales driven by the DfE.

### **5.0 Reasons for decisions**

- 5.1 A dedicated strategic role is required given the scale of change and interface required to maintain local partnership engagement and national body influence to implement sustainable change.

### **6.0 Financial implications**

- 6.1 The Council has been advised that it will receive grant funding from the DfE as part of the Families First for Children Pathfinder programme. At present the final amount of funding is unconfirmed, however indications are that the allocation will be in the region of £1.9 million for 2023-2024, with indications that there will be a year 2 allocation in the region of £2.5 million.

- 6.2 The Deputy Director post will be fixed term until 31 March 2025, and would lead to a cost of between £126,000 and £139,000 (including “on-costs” in addition to salary). All costs related to the Pathfinder project, including the Deputy Director post, will be fully funded by the FFCP grant.  
[JB/10102023/L]

## **7.0 Legal implications**

- 7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.  
[TC/10102023/B]

## **8.0 Equalities implications**

- 8.1 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.

## **9.0 All other implications**

- 9.1 The human resources implications, including the job evaluation of the Deputy Director post 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.