

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	Families First Partnership Programme
Meeting date	10 March 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>This report provides an overview of the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme, the Government's national reform programme for children's social care, and sets out the proposed approach to local implementation.</p> <p>FFP underpins delivery of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, the Government's Plan for Change, and aligns with the NHS 10 Year reform agenda, providing a single delivery framework at place level. The programme aims to reduce crisis driven statutory intervention through earlier preventative measures, safely reduce the number of children entering care, and improve outcomes for children and families through family centred practice and stronger partnership working.</p> <p>The report outlines the local governance and programme management arrangements, including the establishment of a Strategic FFP Board and a multi-disciplinary transformation team, alongside arrangements for partner engagement, workforce development and learning from national pathfinders. It sets out the Council's priority delivery workstreams, including early help pathway development, front door reform, a Family Help pilot, planning for multi-agency child protection arrangements, and options appraisal for Family Group Decision Making.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>The Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Note the contents of the report. b) Consider the implications and impact for safeguarding practice for Children's Services and partner agencies.
Reason for recommendations	To provide an overview of the national reform programme related to safeguarding practice, and to allow the committee to consider the impact and implications for BCP Children's Social Care, and its partners.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr. Richard Burton
Corporate Director	Cathi Hadley
Report Authors	Tracy Ryan – Head of Transformation Juliette Blake – Director of Children’s Social Care
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Information

1. Background

The Families First Partnership (FFP) programme is the Government’s national reform programme for children’s social care in England, launched in April 2025. It aims to rebalance the system towards earlier intervention, integrated family support and more effective multi-agency child protection teams, ensuring children receive the right help at the right time and are supported to remain safely within their families wherever possible.

2. National Context

The programme aims to respond directly to sustained pressures within children’s social care, including rising demand, late (statutory) intervention and variable outcomes. These issues were identified in the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care and the Government’s response, *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, which called for a whole system shift towards prevention, family-led decision making and stronger multiagency working.

FFP underpins delivery of the Government’s Plan for Change and the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which seek to break the link between disadvantage and poor life outcomes. The programme is designed to reduce crisis driven statutory intervention, safely reduce the number of children entering care, and improve the consistency and quality of practice nationally.

FFP provides the primary delivery mechanism through which the ambitions of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill and the NHS 10 Year reform agenda are realised at place level. All three reforms share a focus on early intervention, prevention, family-centred practice and integrated multiagency working, with the shared objective of improving life chances for children, reducing pressure on statutory services and supporting improved long-term population health.

3. Core Element of FFP Reforms

The programme guidance identifies the following key deliverables for all local areas:

a. Family Help

A unified Family Help offer spanning targeted early help and child in need which aims to provide a seamless system of identification of needs, assessment and multi-agency care planning. This aims to ensure children and families ‘Tell their stories once’ and received more timely support.

A Lead Family Help Practitioner role coordinating multi-disciplinary support with a single oversight view of the child, reducing the number of professional 'hand over points' and acting as a key point of contact for the family.

Integrated, multi-agency Family Help teams with clear pathways from first contact to statutory intervention to ensure holistic and integrated support plans for those with complex needs.

b. Multi-agency Child Protection

Establishment of Multi Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs), closer collaboration and information sharing between partner agencies, and Lead Child Protection Practitioners.

This aims to promote shared decision making, risk assessment and planning across social care, health and police creating clear accountability and consistent responses to harm, including extra-familial risks.

c. Family Group Decision Making

Routine and early use of Family Group Decision Making, a family support meeting to enable them to codesign their own support planning.

This enhanced planning meeting aims for greater involvement of wider family networks in safeguarding and care planning, with a focus on safely keeping children within their families wherever possible.

4. Local Implementation

BCP and Partner staff have been working together since May 2025 to understand the expectations of the national guidance and develop a local transformation programme to suit local needs.

Governance

A Strategic Families First Partnership (FFP) Board has been established, comprising senior representatives from key partner agencies. The Board provides strategic oversight, ensures alignment between national reforms and local programmes, and oversees delivery of the FFP transformation.

Transformation Team

A multi-disciplinary transformation team has been established to lead implementation. This includes dedicated FFP staff, secondees from partner agencies and specialist roles aligned to programme priorities and delivery requirements.

Research and Learning

Ten local authorities acted as national FFP Pathfinders for the reforms during 2024–25. Learning from these areas has been shared nationally and continues to inform local design. Dorset Council, the Southwest Pathfinder, remains a key partner, with ongoing joint sessions to align approaches where appropriate.

Engagement

A comprehensive programme of partner, workforce and service user engagement is underway. This includes coordinated communications activity, staff engagement

sessions and workshops, and a series of thematic workstreams to support codesign and implementation.

Key BCP Delivery workstreams

Following initial local engagement and evaluation of BCP's readiness to delivery and scoping, the current focus of delivery is as follows:

Early Help - Strengthening engagement with universal partners (including schools, midwifery, and health visiting) to deliver a single, partnership wide early identification, assessment and planning pathway. This builds on work already underway through the BCP Early Help Strategy 2024–26.

Front Door - Enhancing the children's services front door to move from a triage and process led model to a more conversational, needs led approach, improving timeliness, quality of decision making and access to the right support. This is dependent on expanded multiagency participation. A local vision has been developed and scoping for wider partnership involvement is underway.

Family Help Pilot - In line with FFP guidance, the Early Help and Child in Need safeguarding workforce will be expanded beyond Social Workers to include Alternative Qualified Practitioners acting as Lead Practitioners where appropriate. This aims to strengthen multi-disciplinary practice and earlier intervention. The pilot will be subject to robust evaluation prior to any wider rollout and is due to commence in March 2026.

Multi Agency Child Protection Teams - Scoping and modelling are underway to identify how existing child protection arrangements can be safely enhanced through increased partner involvement and the introduction of Lead Child Protection Practitioners. Pathfinder learning indicates no single national model has emerged as best practice. BCP continues to scope and plan for an enhanced offer with partners. Pending further national consideration of the evidence base for making these changes.

Family Group Decision Making - Staff are being trained to deliver family led planning meetings that strengthen family involvement and resilience. An options appraisal is underway to identify the most cost effective and impactful local delivery model that might be adopted, recognising workforce and resource implications.

All workstreams are subject to robust programme management, including planning, testing and evaluation. Performance management, workforce development and impact assessment are embedded throughout the transformation activity.

5. Summary of financial implications

The FFP national programme is backed by over £500 million in 2025/26, to local Authorities to commence transformation planning. BCP allocation was £1,173,000. From 2026 onwards, funding for the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme is expected to continue for at least a further two years at similar levels, and BCP awaits confirmation of its allocation in spring 2026.

Grant funding is expected to be utilised for transformation activities to implement the reforms and strengthen safeguarding workforce and practice across Children's Services and its partners.

6. Summary of legal implications

The FFP programme does not introduce new local statutory duties beyond those already established in existing children's social care and safeguarding legislation. Delivery of the programme must continue to comply with current legal frameworks, including the Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004, Working Together to Safeguard Children, and associated statutory guidance.

7. Summary of human resources implications

The primary HR impact of the FFP programme relates to workforce change and development, including role adaptation, new ways of working and increased multidisciplinary practice. This will require targeted training, clear role definitions, and effective change management to support staff through implementation. HR services are actively involved throughout delivery, and all workforce changes are being managed in accordance with the Council's established HR policies, procedures and employment law requirements.

8. Summary of sustainability impact

The Families First Partnership programme is intended to support the long-term sustainability of children's services by shifting investment towards earlier intervention, prevention and integrated working, thereby reducing reliance on crisis driven statutory responses over time. While the programme is supported by time limited transformation funding, ongoing sustainability will depend on embedding new practice models, workforce capability and multiagency working into business-as-usual arrangements. Financial, workforce and service impacts will continue to be monitored to ensure that emerging models are affordable, scalable and deliver improved outcomes within available resources.

9. Summary of public health implications

The Families First Partnership programme has positive public health implications through its focus on early intervention, prevention and whole family support. By addressing vulnerability earlier and strengthening multiagency working between children's services, health and community partners, the programme supports improved mental health, wellbeing and developmental outcomes for children and families. Over time, this preventative approach is expected to contribute to reduced health inequalities, lower demand on acute and specialist health services, and improved long term population health outcomes.

10. Summary of equality implications

A full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is being completed for the FFP programme and will be reviewed through the Council's EIA governance process. It is anticipated that the programme will have a positive impact on children, young people and families who experience disadvantage or protected characteristics, through its focus on early intervention, prevention, family led decision making and improved access to coordinated support. No adverse or disproportionate impacts have been identified at this stage; however, the draft EIA recognises that ongoing monitoring will be required as new delivery models are piloted and scaled. Mitigating actions include inclusive service

design, workforce training, and continued engagement with communities and service users.

11. Summary of risk assessment

The key risks associated with the FFP programme relate to the scale and pace of system change, workforce readiness, multi-agency alignment, and the sustainability of funding beyond the transformation period. These risks are being mitigated through phased implementation, piloting and evaluation, strong programme governance and ongoing financial and performance monitoring. Overall, the programme is assessed as manageable risk, with appropriate controls in place.

Background papers

Families First Partnership Programme Presentation

Appendices

Appendix 1 – DfE Families First Programme Guidance