

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Cabinet – 09 June 2025

**Report Title**

Update on the Family Help Strategy in relation to The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide.

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

Yes

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Nicola Curley, Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services

**Report Author(s)**

Kelly White, Assistant Director Family Help

**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

The Early Help Strategy: Family Help in Rotherham 2024-2029, approved by Cabinet in March 2024, was developed in response to revised government guidance, including the Department for Education (DfE) new edition 'Working Together to Safeguard Children December 2023'.

Following the launch of the Early Help Strategy: Family Help in Rotherham 2024-2029 in November 2024, the government published 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive'. This policy statement set out the Government's ambitious approach to rebalancing the children's social care system toward earlier intervention through Family Help.

In February 2025, the Government published the grant determination for the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant for 2025-26 (RMBC allocation £2.083m). This new grant is specifically for direct investment in additional prevention activity for children and families through the implementation of Family Help and Child Protection reforms. It is intended to fund local authorities to deliver against the planned new legislative duties. This is in addition to the Children and Families Grant, which is now mainstreamed funding, initially for the Supporting Families programme and intended to enable continuation of existing prevention services.

In March 2025, the Government published the Families First Partnership Programme Guide. The aim of the programme is to support safeguarding partners to implement

Family Help and multi-agency child protection reforms and make greater use of Family Group Decision Making. The programme guide describes the vision and objectives and sets out the practice change government expect to see to improve the support provided to children and their families. The timeline for delivery of the transformation is ambitious, with significant progress anticipated within this financial year.

This report provides an update on the published guidance and requests approval of the governance structure for the management, oversight and scrutiny of the Families First Partnership Transformation Programme, in accordance with the requirements of the Families First Partnership Programme Guide, Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and the Children's Social Care: national framework.

The report also requests agreement to delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services in consultation with the Lead Member, Children and Young People and the Assistant Director Financial Services to determine the use of the new Children's Social Care Prevention Grant in line with the expectations set out in the Families First Partnership Programme Guide.

## **Recommendations**

That Cabinet:

1. Note the expectations outlined in the Families First Partnership Programme Guide issued in March 2025.
2. Agree to the establishment of the governance structure for the management, oversight, and scrutiny of the Families First Partnership Transformation Programme and delegate approval of Terms of Reference to the Chief Executive in Consultation with the Leader and the Lead Safeguarding Partners.
3. Approve the use of the new Children's Social Care prevention grant to deliver transformation activity (30%), increased direct delivery of family help (50%), practice development, workforce development and ICT development (15%) and children and family voice (5%) as described in 2.15.
4. Delegate authority in line with recommendation 3 (above) to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services in consultation with the Lead Member for, Children and Young People and the Assistant Director Financial Services.
5. Agree to receive a further update in November 2025 detailing the progress towards the expectations outlined in the Families First Partnership Programme Guide and expenditure of the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant.

## **List of Appendices Included**

Appendix 1 – Family First Partnership Programme Governance  
Appendix 2 – Part A - Initial Equality screening Assessment form  
Appendix 3 – Early Help Strategy Carbon Impact Assessment

## **Background Papers**

[The families first partnership programme guide](#) March 2025.

[Children's Social Care Prevention Grant Determination 2025 to 2026: draft](#) February 2025.

[Cabinet report - Early Help Strategy: Family Help in Rotherham 2024 – 2029. 18th March 2024](#)

[Early Help Strategy – Family Help in Rotherham 2024-2029](#)

[Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

[Children Act 2004 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[Guide for children and young people: Stable Homes, Built on Love - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Children's social care: national framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

## **Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

N/A

## **Council Approval Required**

No

## **Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

## **Update on the Family Help Strategy in relation to The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Early Help Strategy: Family Help in Rotherham 2024-2029, approved by Cabinet in March 2024, articulates Rotherham's vision for family help. The Strategy describes three areas of support for children and families. These are Universal and Community Family Help; Focused Family Help; and Specialist Family Help.
- 1.2 On 17 March 2025 Cabinet received an update on the progress made in year 1 of the Early Help Strategy: Family Help in Rotherham 2024-2029. Significant progress was achieved against Phase 1 in year one of the five-year Delivery Plan.
- 1.3 Cabinet noted the minimum expectations detailed in The Families First Partnership Programme: Initial guidance document issued in December 2024 and agreed to be provided with a further update in Autumn 2025 once further government guidance is received.
- 1.4 The Families First Partnership (FFP) programme guide published in March 2025 provides clear expectations for safeguarding partners to transform how support and protection are provided to families, focusing on early intervention and prevention to avoid crisis situations. It emphasises a whole-family approach, bringing together multi-disciplinary professionals to support families in overcoming challenges and remaining together. The programme also involves greater family network engagement and stronger multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.
- 1.5 The programme guide is not statutory guidance and does not replace existing statutory guidance, including Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: or the Children's social care: national framework. Four chapters set out; the vision for transformation in family support, to rebalance the system away from crisis intervention and toward earlier help and support; delivery expectations for Family Help, multi-agency child protection and Family Group Decision Making; key principles and system enablers and the national delivery support offer.
- 1.6 Key aspects of the Families First programme include:
  - Early Intervention and Prevention: The programme prioritises supporting families early on to prevent issues from escalating.
  - Whole-Family Approach: Multi-disciplinary professionals work together to address family needs rather than focusing solely on individuals.
  - Multi-Agency Working: The programme encourages collaboration between various agencies to ensure families receive joined-up support.

- **Strengths-Based Approach:** Families are supported to recognise their strengths and build resilience, empowering them to participate in their own development.
- **Family Networks:** The programme promotes greater involvement of family members in decision-making and providing support.
- **Stronger Safeguarding:** The programme aims to improve safeguarding arrangements, including the role of education and improved information sharing.
- **Local Multi-Disciplinary Family Help Services:** These services bring together early help, child in need and child protection provision to provide seamless support, differentiated to meet diverse needs.
- **Dedicated Child Protection Teams:** The programme includes new, expert-led teams to protect children from harm, differentiated to meet diverse needs.

1.7 Following publication of the Families First Partnership Programme Guide in March 2025, Children and Young People's Services have worked with safeguarding partners to understand the required transformation in Rotherham.

## **2. Key Issues**

2.1 In the first year of the strategy the Assistant Director for Family Help has led a working group including representatives from across Early Help and Children's Social Care. The working group reviewed current arrangements in preparation for design and implementation of an effective delivery model taking into consideration feedback and changes to government guidance and legislation.

2.2 On 17 March 2025 Cabinet received an update on the overall progress made in year 1 of the Early Help Strategy: Family Help in Rotherham 2024-2029. The update advised that when published, the Families First Partnership Programme would be reflected in the development of the strategy Phase 2 (2025/26) Implement and Deliver.

2.3 The Family First Partnership Programme requires a transformative journey, with key changes expected from April 2025 to March 2026 and beyond. The immediate focus includes maintaining regular operations while appointing a programme lead to steer the development of a strategic plan. This will involve publishing an updated threshold document and creating a digital platform to assist families and practitioners in navigating services.

2.4 A population needs assessment must be completed to inform the transformation, which will see multi-disciplinary teams collaborating with a particular emphasis on joining Family Help and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). As the foundational steps take shape, longer-term

changes should aim to integrate Early Help Practitioners, and Social Workers into a unified Family Help Service, addressing needs from targeted early help to child protection. A Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT), should include Social Workers, Police Officers, Health Practitioners, and other specialists tailored to community needs.

- 2.5 The workforce is required to evolve with the creation of Family Help Lead Practitioners (FHLPs) and Lead Child Protection Practitioners. The revised threshold document will underpin updated practice frameworks and protocols. These frameworks will prioritise whole-family assessments, tailored plans for diverse needs, and efficient processes for allocation, step-up/step-down, and harm outside the home. Oversight arrangements will ensure consistent supervision for all FHLPs.
- 2.6 Family Help will adopt a relationship-based model, emphasising tailored support for families with complex or diverse needs, including those facing barriers such as disability, language, or mental health challenges. Efforts will include innovative engagement strategies and co-production with families to create meaningful support offers.
- 2.7 Front door arrangements will be reviewed to ensure they are non-stigmatising, with an integrated approach. Services will be co-designed with individuals from diverse and high-needs communities, ensuring engagement and support for families in challenging circumstances. Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) will be mandated, offering structured facilitation and training for practitioners.
- 2.8 The transformation will aim to use data-sharing agreements to facilitate tracking needs and outcomes across education, healthcare, social care, police, and other sectors. Case management systems will be unified, enabling proportionate access for all partners and supporting single-family assessments. The potential integration of Artificial Intelligence for risk and needs analysis will be considered.
- 2.9 To deliver the Families First Programme Transformation, Phase 2 of the Early Help Strategy: Family Help it is proposed that six workstream steering groups drive delivery of the programme. Strategic oversight will be provided through the establishment of the Families First Partnership Programme Delivery group and Executive Group. The workstreams will report into the Families First Partnership Programme Delivery Group chaired by the Director of Children's Services. The delivery group will report into the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Group and the Families First Partnership Programme Executive Group. The Executive group will be chaired by the Chief Executive and will be responsible and accountable for implementation of the transformation within the Council. The Programme Guide is explicit that all final design and structures are a partnership responsibility and will ultimately be approved by the Lead Safeguarding Partners designated in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (i.e. the Chief Executive of the Council, the Chief Executive of the ICB and the Chief Constable). Regular reports to Cabinet, Lead Safeguarding Partners and the Health and Wellbeing Board via Place Board will ensure

transparency. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the proposed governance structure for delivery of the Families First Programme Transformation, Phase 2 of the Early Help Strategy: Family Help.

- 2.10 The workstream steering groups will take responsibility for overseeing the population needs assessment, the review and refresh of the threshold document and associated practice guidance and protocols, Development of the Family Help service delivery model (including the Front Door, Early Help and Child in Need) differentiated to meet diverse needs, a Family Help digital offer, Multi-Agency Child Protection delivery model differentiated to meet diverse needs, an offer for Kinship Carers and Care Leavers and embed Family Group Decision Making.
- 2.11 Analysis of the population needs assessment and engagement with key the statutory partners will inform the workstream steering groups' development of the workforce required to deliver the vision for an integrated system of family help and multi-agency child protection. This will include responsibility for the creation of Family Help Lead Practitioners (FHLPs) and Lead Child Protection Practitioners, and the establishment of new roles and a robust workforce development offer for the expertise required to meet the identified diverse needs e.g. attendance/ inclusion, SEND, kinship carers and care leavers. Specific navigator roles may well be appropriate to meet need in these areas, as well as possibly specialist practitioners in a range of areas such as prevention of domestic abuse, mental health support and drug and alcohol services. This will be subject to the needs assessment and ongoing DfE requirements.
- 2.12 The workstreams are also responsible for the delivery of and arrangements for family voice and the implementation of appropriate information-sharing, development of unified case management systems and exploration of potential integration of Artificial Intelligence.
- 2.13 Local Authorities have been provided with a Children's Social Care Prevention Grant for 2025-26. This is for direct investment to support the implementation of Family Help and Child Protection reforms. It is intended to fund local authorities to deliver against the planned new legislative duties. The grant can be used to buy in dedicated resource from partners, such as secondment arrangements, to support the development of the delivery plan and ongoing transformation. Plans should also consider expenditure, including transformation spend and resourcing a new/expanded team within the Council.
- 2.14 The Government recognises that every grant recipient, with their partners, are approaching these reforms from a different starting point and consequently, the proportion of transformation (including design) versus services spend in 25/26 will vary. Grant recipients are expected to spend around 30% of the funding on transformation activity to establish the right conditions for effective and sustainable practice and service change. The remainder of the grant should be spent on new prevention service delivery, alongside the Children and Families Grant.

- 2.15 The 30% spend on transformation activity (approximately £600,000) would include undertaking a joint family help needs analysis, stakeholder engagement and co-production of service delivery models. To establish the right conditions for effective and sustainable practice and service change it is anticipated a transformation team will be required. Learning from pathfinders indicates the transformation team should include (but not be limited to) a strategic lead, a senior project transformation lead, a project manager, secondment opportunities for key partners e.g. health, police, education, voluntary sector and commissioning, finance, HR, and performance resource.
- 2.16 It is envisaged that 50% of the grant (approximately £1 million) will be spent on direct delivery of family help including the development of new roles and interventions, 15% of the grant (approximately £300,000) will be spent on practice development, workforce development and ICT development and 5% of the grant (approximately £100,000) will be spent on children and family voice. Direct delivery of family help will include required changes to the integrated front door and multi-disciplinary teams in preventative services; increased access to family decision making meetings; changes to enable multi-agency child protection services to be implemented; support to the graduated response for kinship services; early intervention activity around ensuring children are in education settings; early intervention support to children with additional needs; and work around any practice model changes once these are determined by the multi-agency partnership.
- 2.17 The Children and Families Grant comprises previous Department for Education grants including Supporting Families. The Children and Families grant is intended to enable continuation of existing prevention service delivery.
- 2.18 The timeline for delivery of the transformation is ambitious, with significant progress anticipated within this financial year. Grant recipients must provide regular information to DfE, including local data, to provide assurance and support understanding of transformation and delivery progress against the objectives. Data collection will be conducted quarterly, starting June 2025.
- 2.19 More details will be published in guidance; however, reporting requirements will include the following:
- Detail on the Family Help workforce
  - Information on the children benefiting from Family Help and child protection services
  - Number of FGDM meetings offered prior to/at the 'letter before proceedings' to parents/those with parental responsibility; number of meetings facilitated after the offer is made
  - A quarterly breakdown of expenditure, detailing costs across transformation activity, service design and service delivery.



- 2.20 Delegation of authority to determine the use of the new Children's Social Care Prevention Grant in line with the expectations set out in the Families First Partnership Programme Guide would provide the ability to implement the transformation within the ambitious timeline.

### **3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to note the expectations outlined in the Families First Partnership Programme Guide issued in March 2025.
- 3.2 Cabinet is asked to agree the governance structure for the management, oversight, and scrutiny of the Families First Partnership Transformation Programme, phase 2 of the Early Help Strategy: Family Help in Rotherham 2024-2029. This will provide a clear structure with defined responsibilities and accountability for the delivery of this phase of the Early Help Strategy, including the Families First Partnership Transformation programme. This will ensure the Council is compliant with the recent legislative and policy change and is able to deliver its commitment in line with best practice to ensure effective services are in place for all children and young people in the Borough.
- 3.3 Cabinet is asked to delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services in consultation with the Lead Member, Children and Young People and the Assistant Director Financial Services to determine the use of the new Children's Social Care Prevention Grant in line with the expectations set out in the Families First Partnership Programme Guide. This will ensure robust and timely allocation of the grant to deliver the transformation programme within the period specified.
- 3.4 The alternative option is not to note the expectations or agree the governance and delegated authority to enable delivery of the programme. This would result in non-compliance with the government's legislative and policy requirements including the statutory guidance on multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children. This is likely to result in underutilisation of the grant funding provided to support this transformation. This option is not recommended.

### **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1 Engagement and consultation with Public Health, Finance, HR, Marketing and Communications and Children and Young People's Service representatives has informed the interpretation of the guidance documentation and proposed governance.
- 4.2 The Safeguarding Partners have been briefed; they are supportive of the proposed governance. A further development session is planned to inform membership of the workstream steering groups.

## **5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1 Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Development session to take place in May.
- 5.2 Inaugural meeting of the Family First Partnership Programme Delivery Group in June following Cabinet approval.
- 5.3 Inaugural meeting of the Family First Partnership Programme Executive Group in June/ July following Cabinet approval.
- 5.4 Funding released to enable appointment to key transformation roles/ functions following Cabinet approval in June.
- 5.5 Inaugural meetings of the workstream steering groups to take place in June. Progress against the required delivery is monitored by the Family First Partnership Programme Delivery Group.
- 5.6 A further update on the delivery of Phase 2 of the Early Help Strategy: Family Help including the Families First Programme Transformation, will be brought to Cabinet as planned in the Autumn.

## **6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in this report.
- 6.2 The Council has been allocated £2.083m children social care prevention grant in 2025/26. The grant is ringfenced for direct investment in additional prevention activity for children and families through the implementation of Family Help and Child Protection reforms. The grant should be used alongside the existing Children and Families grants (inclusive of Supporting Families funding), which will enable continuation of existing prevention services.
- 6.3 In accordance with the draft grant determination letter, the £2.083m funding should be used for the following activities:
  - 1. **Transformation** – the council is allowed to spend (as one-off and/or set up costs) a proportion of the funding (maximum of 30%) on transformation activity to increase readiness for system change, which would include the following: (1) establishing a transformation team including but not limited to a strategic lead, a senior project transformation lead, a project manager, secondment opportunities for key partners and commissioning, finance, HR and performance resource. (2) Buy-in dedicated resource from partners e.g. health, police, education, voluntary sector, such as secondment arrangements, to support the development of the delivery plan.
  - 2. **Service Design** – the grant funding is allowed to be used for (1) undertaking a joint family help needs analysis to inform new service

delivery models; (2) stakeholder engagement (with local partners) to co-produce and design new service delivery models and strengthen multi-agency working and safeguarding arrangements. A diverse range of service users and practitioners are expected to be engaged in the co-design process.

3. **Service Delivery** - the grant is expected to be used across the full breadth of preventative services, including Early Help, Family Help, Family Networks, and child protection. Service delivery costs is expected to include additional workforce and commissioned services to enable the council to offer new and updated services for families and children, which meet the policy principles set out in the Programme Guidance. Paragraphs 2.7 to 2.12 provide an indication of some of the key service changes expected from April 2025 to March 2026 and beyond.

- 6.4 It should be noted that the focus in the first year would be on maintaining existing service delivery, whilst undertaking the necessary transformation and service design work (with local partners) to establish how existing services align with future delivery. DfE will expect a quarterly breakdown of expenditure, detailing costs across transformation activity, service design and service delivery.

## **7. Legal Advice and Implications**

- 7.1 Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 requires local authorities in their social services functions to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State. Furthermore, under section 10 (8) and section 11 (4) of the Children Act 2004, local authorities are to have regard to any guidance given to them by the Secretary of State. It is under this legislation local authorities must also have regard to, Working Together to Safeguard Children, updated in 2023 which provides statutory guidance on how practitioners working with children, young people and their families should work together to ensure children and young people remain safe from harm. In addition, Children's Social Care National Framework, Dec 2023 sets guidance on the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.
- 7.2 Further statutory guidance was provided in November 2024, Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive that focused on keeping families together and children safe as well exploring to make the care system. In December 2024, The Children's Wellbeing and School Bill was introduced. The key policy changes include measures around family group decision making, multi-agency child protection teams, strengthening the role of education within the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, information sharing and consistent identifiers.
- 7.3 The Families First Partnership (FFP) programme guidance, March 2025 whilst it is not statutory guidance, builds on the foundations already in place through the requirements of Working Together and the National Framework and sets out the practice change the government expects to see to improve the support provided to children and their families. The key policy changes,

set out in the Children's Wellbeing and School Bill 2024, have also been included in the FPP.

- 7.4 In view of legislation and statutory guidance that local authorities ought to have regard to, it is to be noted that there would need to be exceptional reasons for not doing so. Considering the proposals set out above, there are no legal implications that arise by following the recommendations set out at 3.1 – 3.3.

## **8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

- 8.1 HR will continue to provide support and advice where changes may be required or the introduction of new posts.

## **9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

- 9.1 The aim of the Families First Partnership Programme is to support safeguarding partners to implement Family Help and multi-agency child protection reforms and make greater use of Family Group Decision Making. Government expects to see improved support provided to children and their families. The programme aligns with the key local partnership priorities and plans including Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Plan 2022/25, Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership plan and associated strategies, Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Plan and Rotherham Health and Social Care Place Plan.

- 9.2 In delivering the expectations outlined in the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme guide, safeguarding partners will transform how support and protection are provided to families, focusing on early intervention and prevention to avoid crisis situations. This will emphasise the whole-family approach embedded in Rotherham practice, bringing together multi-disciplinary professionals to support families in overcoming challenges and remaining together.

## **10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

- 10.1 As this is a progress update, there are equality implications, but equality and diversity will continue to be considered and monitored as part of the strategy.

A Part A Initial Equality Screening Assessment is attached as Appendix 2.

## **11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change**

- 11.1 Implications included in the Carbon Impact Assessment (Appendix 3).

## **12. Implications for Partners**

- 12.1 These are referred to in the report.

### 13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 These are referred to in the report.

### 14. Accountable Officers

Kelly White – Acting Assistant Director, Early Help & Business Support

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	<b>Named Officer</b>	<b>Date</b>
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp OBE	23/05/2025
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	15/05/2025
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	15/05/2025

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