

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Cabinet – 17 November 2025

**Report Title**

Families First Partnership Programme

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

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

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

**Report Author(s)**

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Strategic Programme Lead (Families First Partnership)

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**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

Cabinet received a report on 9th June 2025 outlining the approach to be taken by the Council and partners in response to the Government publication of the Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme. This report provides an update in respect of the progress to date including the expenditure of the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant.

**Recommendations**

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the progress made since the last update on 9th June 2025.
2. Notes the expenditure of the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant since the last update on 9th June 2025.
3. Agrees to receive a further update in March 2026.

**Background Papers**

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

[Children's Social Care Prevention Grant Determination 2025 to 2026 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 \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Cabinet Report 09 June 2025](#)

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

N/A

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

## **Families First Partnership Programme**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 In February 2025, the Government published the grant determination for the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant for 2025-26 (Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (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.
- 1.2 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 expected 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 (2025-26).

### **2. Key Issues**

- 2.1 Following Cabinet approval on 9 June 2025 to establish the governance structure for the management, oversight, and scrutiny of the Families First Partnership Transformation Programme, progress has been made by the Council in realising the ambition of the programme and initiating a partnership approach to delivery.
- 2.2 On 4 September 2025, the inaugural meeting of the Families First Programme Delivery Group was held. This meeting had good representation by key officers across the partnership including South Yorkshire Police, Health, and Education, along with Council service areas.
- 2.3 The objective and subsequent outcome of the meeting was to agree and finalise a Terms of Reference, which will hold individual organisations to account for their contribution to the programme, ensuring representatives at the delivery group recognise their responsibility as the conduit back to their respective organisations to provide updates and ensure delivery of the programme is joined up.
- 2.4 On 9th June 2025, Cabinet received confirmation of the intended enabling workstreams which will be accountable to the Families First Partnership Programme Delivery Group, for mobilising and driving forward some of the key changes and opportunities within the programme. These workstreams have now been established as below;

Workstream	Objectives
Family Help Partnership Group	<p>To manage the delivery of the Family Help Strategy in Rotherham, considering the implications of the Families First Partnership Programme.</p> <p>In addition, to evaluate and consider the approach in response to the commissioned needs analysis, which should be completed by December 2025.</p>
Workforce Group	<p>To co-ordinate and manage any changes required in respect of the workforce to deliver the objectives of the Families First Partnership Programme, including the planning and progression of establishing Family Help Lead Practitioner and Lead Child Protection Practitioner roles, as prescribed in the Programme Guidance.</p>
Practice Development Group	<p>Established to lead the review and refresh of the required threshold document and associated practice guidance in line with the Families First Partnership Programme Guidance.</p> <p>Progress the changes required to further embed Family Group Decision Making, enhancing the environments in which families are better prepared to find their own solutions.</p>
Statutory Children's Service Multi-Agency Steering Group	<p>Agree the shared vision, structure, and practice framework that includes senior management oversight and accountability for delivery and delegated decision making (as part of strategic, statutory multi-agency safeguarding arrangements).</p>
ICT Development Group	<p>Review and implement new technologies to underpin better information sharing and making</p>

	<p>access to support and information easier for families, children, and young people.</p> <p>Linked to - Information sharing and consistent identifiers – Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill.</p>
Voice Steering Group	<p>A forum to provide a safe space for families, children, and young people to share their lived experience, to help shape future service design.</p>

2.5 On 18 September 2025, an update in respect of the Families First Partnership Programme was presented to the Rotherham Safeguarding Children’s Partnership Wider Network Meeting, giving an opportunity for partners to be updated on key progress of the programme. This update was well received and provided a good opportunity to ensure all partners commence the transformation journey together.

2.6 In addition to the programme governance arrangements being established, a number of key appointments have been made. These additional resources will form a transformation team providing dedicated capacity to enable the programme to accelerate delivery. The following appointments have now been made:

2.6.1 **Strategic Programme Lead – Families First Partnership (in post since 1<sup>st</sup> September)**

This role will have overall responsibility to manage the programme, with accountability through the programme governance arrangements as well as presenting formal updates back to the Department for Education (DfE).

The Strategic Programme Lead will manage the other resources within the Transformation Team.

2.6.2 **Participation Lead – (Start date 13<sup>th</sup> October 2025)**

A fundamental element of the programme will be to work with and capture the voice of children and young people alongside family networks to ensure future service delivery is modelled around lived experience.

As prescribed in the Families First Partnership Programme Guidance any co-design activity should have the voices of children, young people, and families at the heart of new service design.

This role will bring new and innovative ideas to ensure we build on the existing voice and participation support services available to families and act as a catalyst for change.

### **2.6.3 Communication and Marketing Manager – (Start date 13<sup>th</sup> October 2025)**

A designated Communications and Marketing role to ensure communications across key partners and stakeholders is consistent, timely and informative.

In addition, making best use of new and emerging digital technology platforms to maximise reach and engagement in activities where family participation is required/encouraged.

This role will oversee all internal and external comms around the Families First Partnership Programme, ensuring messaging is suitable for its intended audience, is accessible and uses simple to understand language.

Furthermore, it is anticipated this resource will support the review and refresh of all public facing websites, ensuring a comprehensive suite of help and support available for families, building on the success of the Rotherham Family Hubs website and approach to consolidate information and advice.

### **2.6.4 Attendance Leads (x3) – (Recruitment expected to complete by the end of Nov 2025)**

The intended outcomes are to support improvements in attendance for vulnerable children and those transitioning between key academic years. Support required by families will be identified jointly by Attendance Leads and schools, with anticipated target groups being:

- Primary age children with attendance below 50%, without an EHCP and not open to any formal support service
  - Attendance Leads will provide an intensive level of support with at least weekly contact initially, gradually building resilience within the family unit to support ongoing improvement in school attendance and reduce reliance on external support.
- Primary to Secondary Transition, working with identified secondary schools and feeder primaries to target children and young people with existing poor attendance and / or have a sibling in the secondary with poor attendance to try and break the cycle
  - Attendance Leads will develop structured programme of support across an identified cohort, offering weekly group sessions to young people in school and parental engagement alongside this.

### **2.6.5 Family Help Navigators (x2) – Specialised in Kinship (in post since 15<sup>th</sup> September 2025)**

These Family Help Navigators will be recognised experts in the field of Kinship, with a comprehensive knowledge of the Kinship Local Offer, which will provide an improved support offer for kinship families.

These resources will be available as a first point of contact for kinship families or professionals who need support and advice surrounding kinship.

It is expected that these professionals will facilitate support groups, make visits to and advocate for kinship families.

It is anticipated the success of these roles will be evaluated by an increase in kinship families accessing help earlier and more easily finding the help they need.

2.7 In addition to the roles above secondment opportunities have been offered across South Yorkshire Police, Health and Education, to strengthen the partnership approach to deliver the objectives set out in the Families First Partnership Programme. The Police secondee will be a shared resource with Doncaster City Council. The Education secondee will be representative of secondary and primary settings. Recruitment into these newly created posts is underway. Interviews are arranged for the Education role, and the Police role. Recruitment to the health role from within the Integrated Care Board was unsuccessful and alternative arrangements are now being explored.

2.8 In addition to local arrangements, a number of officers representing Rotherham have engaged in regional opportunities to share best practice and provide peer support in respect of the delivery of the Families First Partnership Programme.

2.9 The Yorkshire and Humber Sector Led Improvement Programme have established a Family Help Network *'to convene a cross-agency network of senior leaders from social work, early help, (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND), education, and key partner agencies to drive forward the ambitions of the Families First Partnership Programme. The workstream will support Sector Led transformation through Family Help, Family Group Decision Making, and multi-agency child protection reforms, with a focus on improving outcomes for children and families.'*

2.10 The Family Help Network is sponsored by Directors of Children's Services at the following local authorities;

- York
- North East Lincolnshire

2.11 The anticipated outcomes of the Family Help Network are detailed in the Terms of Reference and described below;

*Every Local Authority (LA) strengthens their approach and processes with partners regarding the Families First for Children Partnership, specifically:*

- *Through sub regional events, every LA has the opportunity to develop networks with key partners to progress the transformation work in relation to Families First Community of Practice (FFCP).*
- *Every LA has an opportunity to have their model quality assured through the regional community of practice.*

- *Every LA is supported to understand the requirements of the Families First Partnership Guidance promoting local flexibility within a shared regional vision.*
- *The group will explore the principles of Family Help and multi-agency child protection as a single integrated system through a regional community of practice and inviting guest speakers from pathfinders and the Department for Education.*
- *Through regional engagements with partners and LA colleagues we will strengthen multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and workforce development.*
- *Share key documents, such as example Family Help assessments, job descriptions and practice models etc. across the regional Family Help Network.*
- *Build on good practice and learning in the region and share innovative ideas that focus on better outcomes for children and families.*
- *Use evidenced based practice to guide our thinking and practice.*
- *Share national Ofsted feedback re. the Families First for Children Partnership.*
- *Share learning and practice in relation to key policy guidance, such as The Best Start for Life for example.*

- 2.12 In addition, as commissioned by Yorkshire and Humber Sector Led Improvement Programme, The Innovation Unit will be facilitating a regional community of practice for all fifteen Local Authorities in the Yorkshire and Humber region. This will provide a structured and on-going framework for peer support and coaching to facilitate collaborative learning and the sharing of best practice across the region. The Innovation Unit, working with regional DCS's, will be designing and delivering a series of communities of practice throughout the remainder of the 2025/26 financial year.
- 2.13 As part of the wider Families First Partnership Programme governance arrangements, the DfE allocate a Regional Lead to provide support and advice to all local authorities.
- 2.14 Representatives from RMBC have recently met with the lead officer for the area and have received positive feedback in relation to the depth and breadth of the proposed delivery plan. In addition, there is real interest in the outcomes of the commissioned needs analysis. Monthly meetings are scheduled moving forward for the entirety of the Families First Partnership Programme.
- 2.15 Further resources and access to support and guidance is available via the Knowledge Hub, a useful digital resource for professionals supporting the delivery of the Families First Partnership Programme.
- 2.16 Part of the Families First Partnership Programme funding will be to commission a Voluntary Community Sector Organisation to co-produce a number of engagement activities, ensuring that families are truly at the heart of our transformation journey, the commissioning activity is underway and a final



decision on the successful applicant should be known by the end of November 2025.

- 2.17 In terms of next steps, the Council look forward to receiving the needs assessment and working with Public Health colleagues, and the transformation team to consider how this will shape planning and service delivery. Co-production with children and families, as well as local partners and ward members, will feature heavily in the shaping of services to ensure that children are supported at the earliest opportunity. This will also include consultation with staff.
- 2.18 The successful delivery of the Families First Programme will be underpinned by partnership collaboration with the Police, Health and Education (Secondary and Primary), as well as wider services and relevant agencies such as Probation, Youth Justice, Housing and Voluntary Community Sector organisations.
- 2.19 Representation and engagement from leaders and practitioners from the Voluntary Community Sector will allow strategic decision-making to be informed; respective views to be reflected in agreeing new service models; voice to be captured; organisational roles and responsibilities defined to enable change and ensure appropriate resources are allocated at the right time.
- 2.20 There is a commitment from the transformation programme to ensure all the workstreams outlined in section 2.4 of this document (and any further work packages identified as part of the delivery journey) have representation from partners and the Voluntary Community Sector, and where required these arrangements will be formalised through Terms of Reference.

### **3. Recommendations**

#### **3.1 That Cabinet:**

- 1. note the progress made since the last update on 9th June 2025.
- 2. note the expenditure of the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant since the last update on 9th June 2025.
- 3. agree to receive a further update in March 2026.

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

- 4.1 A key focus of the Families First Partnership Programme is to keep partners fully engaged both in terms of shaping the approach to delivery but also accountable in terms of their respective responsibilities. The commencement of the Families First Partnership Programme Delivery Group ensures all partners are consulted on progress.

## 5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 A further update to the progress of the Families First Partnership Programme is proposed to be presented to Cabinet in March 2026.

## 6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 Any engagement of third party suppliers to support the delivery of the Families First Partnership Programme must be procured in compliance with the relevant procurement legislation (Procurement Act 2023 or the Public Contracts Regulations 2015) depending on the most appropriate route to market selected, as well as the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.
- 6.2 The Cabinet report dated 9 June 2025 confirmed that Rotherham has been allocated £2.083 million for the financial year 2025/26 through the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant. This funding is ringfenced for direct investment in enhanced prevention activities for children and families, delivered through the implementation of the Family First Partnership Programme (FFPP). Subsequently, the Government has awarded an additional £0.127 million to support further transformation initiatives. This brings the total funding allocated to Rotherham for 2025/26 to £2.210 million.
- 6.3 In addition to confirming the funding allocation, the Cabinet report of June 2025 set out the intended use of the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant in line with the conditions outlined in the Grant Determination Letter. The funding will be used to support the following: to deliver transformation activity; increased direct delivery of family help; practice development, workforce development and ICT development; and children and family voice.
- 6.4 The table below outlines the planned expenditure and commitments to date for 2025/26, as agreed under delegated authority in accordance with the June 2025 Cabinet report:

<b>Transformation</b> Funding (maximum of 30%) should be spent on activities to increase readiness for system change and establishing a transformation team		
1	Transformation team - programme manager; service, data/performance, communications, parent partnership leads and project support	335,677
2	Secondments from Partner organisations	150,000
		<b>484,667</b>
<b>Service Delivery (Practice, Workforce &amp; ICT)</b> funding to be used across the full breadth of preventative services, including, Family Help, Family Networks, and child protection. Costs are expected to include additional workforce and commissioned services to enable the council to offer new and updated services		
3	Early Help - Establishing a Kinship Virtual Hub	85,772
4	Children Social Care - funding 2x post- Special Guardianship Order (SGO) support posts	63,000

5	Education - increasing staff capacity in the Elective Home Education team	100,149
6	Education - strengthening the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements	120,000
7	Early Help - increased service management capacity	155,874
8	Children Social Care - funding 3x temporary FSWs in Engage team	32,579
9	Early Help - 0-19 family help graduated response for children with SEND	223,007
10	Education - focused multi agency / preventative work in Education Psychology Service	62,773
11	Children Social Care - enhancing multi-agency child protection teams / safeguarding arrangements	250,000
12	ICT Developments - to support single system information / data sharing	tbc
		<b>1,093,154</b>
<b>Service Design (children &amp; families voice)</b> the funding is allowed to be used for undertaking a joint family help needs analysis and on stakeholder engagement (with local partners) to co-produce and design new service delivery models		
13	Commissioning joint family help needs analysis	£19,484
14	Co-production work with partners, children, and families	£21,443
		<b>21,443</b>
	<b>Total commitments to date</b>	<b>£1,619,758</b>

- 6.5 Work is ongoing to commit the current balance of funding of £0.591m in the current year, as well as ensure committed funds are spent in the year. In accordance with the grant conditions, the Council is required to provide assurance to the DfE on its transformation and delivery progress as well as a quarterly breakdown of expenditure, detailing costs across transformation activity, service design and service delivery.

## 7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The Families First Partnership Programme represents the Government's expectations around children getting the best start in life and breaking down barriers to opportunities to achieve this. It is to be noted that the programme is not statutory guidance and therefore does not replace the current statutory guidance such as, Working together to Safeguard Children 2023 "Working Together" or Children's social care; national framework, "National Framework." However, its use builds on foundations already in place, such as the need for safeguarding partners and agencies to work collaboratively to design and implement local arrangements to meet the needs of children and families in the local area which this paper addresses.

7.2 The establishment of workstreams that will be accountable to the Families First Partnership Programme Delivery Group are noted at 2.3 above which is in line with the delivery expectations covered in the Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide including the appointment of the Family Help Practitioner (FHELP), further progress around family group decision-making, establishing multi-agency child protection arrangements and implement new technologies around information sharing between agencies. It is also to be noted that the views of the family are also being captured at The Voice Steering group which also captures the voice of the child. The voice of the child is a principle from the Children Act 1989 and also embedded in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, (UNCRC), article 3 and article 12 taking into consideration the best interests of the child and preserving a child's right to express their views about decisions affecting them.

7.3 In view of the FFP Programme Guide which sets out delivery expectations for safeguarding partners, there are no legal implications raised in the update provided by following the recommendations at 3.1 above.

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

8.1 HR will continue to support the recruitment for the identified posts within the report and represent on the appropriate groups to ensure that advice is provided on any workforce issues.

## **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, 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 Programme guide, safeguarding partners will transform how support and protection is 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 no wider equality implications, but equality and diversity will continue to be considered and monitored as part of the strategy.

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

- 11.1 The principal climate impact resulting from this decision is increased transport emissions related to attendance of meetings by council officers and partner organisations. To mitigate this, the use of Microsoft Teams will be considered to remove the need to travel. Where meetings are considered necessary, they will be located in central buildings to encourage the use of public transport. Car sharing will be promoted.
- 11.2 While the proposed programme of works does not have any direct impacts on resilience to climate change, supporting families could contribute to families' broader resilience, including their capacity to deal with the impacts of climate change.

## **12. Implications for Partners**

- 12.1 These are referred to in the report.

## **13. Risks and Mitigation**

- 13.1 There are no new risks associated with this progress update, a risk register is maintained as part of the Programme Delivery and reviewed by the Families First Partnership Programme Delivery Group.

## **14. Accountable Officers**

Kelly White, Assistant Director – Family Help

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	<b>Named Officer</b>	<b>Date</b>
Chief Executive	John Edwards	28/10/25
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	22/10/25
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	22/10/25

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