

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Cabinet – 16 March 2026

**Report Title**

Families First Partnership Programme

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

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

**Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report**

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

**Report Author(s)**

Rob Savage

Strategic Programme Lead (Families First Partnership)

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**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

Cabinet received an update report on 17 November 2025 following the start of the Families First Partnership Programme which was approved at Cabinet in June 2025.

This report provides a further update in respect of the progress to date and the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant spend.

**Recommendations**

That Cabinet:

1. Note the progress made since the last update on 17 November 2025.
2. Note the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant spend since the last update on 17 November 2025.

**List of Appendices Included**

Appendix 1 – RSCP Multi-Agency Threshold Guidance and Descriptors

Appendix 2 – Initial Equality Screening Assessment

Appendix 3 – Climate Impact Assessment

## **Background Papers**

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

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

[Cabinet report - 18th March 2024](#)

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

[Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](#)

[publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

[Children Act 2004 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

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

[www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

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

[Cabinet Report 09 June 2025](#)

[Cabinet Report 17 November 2025](#)

[Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Plan 2025-2030](#)

[Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2030](#)

Rotherham Health and Social Care Place Plan.

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

No

## **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 (RMBC allocation £2.083m). This new grant is specifically for direct investment in additional prevention activity for children and families implementing the Department for Education's (DfE) Family Help and Child Protection reforms. The grant is intended to fund local authorities to deliver against the planned new legislative duties. The grant 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 (FGDM). 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 the first year.
- 1.3 In December 2025, Ministers issued a joint letter confirming further funding to continue the Families First Partnership Programme, as well as emphasising the expectation of effective partnership working.

### **2. Key Progress**

#### **2.1 Transformation Team**

- 2.1.1 Since the update to Cabinet in November 2025, the transformation team has made the following appointments;
- A Detective Inspector from South Yorkshire Police to work with Rotherham and Doncaster on the programme.
  - An education lead to represent both primary and secondary education sectors.
  - A health lead to act as the link between the Council and health settings.
- 2.1.2 The appointment of these officers is a positive reflection of the appetite in Rotherham for co-production and partnership working, to ensure families, children and young people receive the best support and early intervention they can.
- #### **2.2 Regional work**
- 2.2.1 Since the previous update, progress has been made against the delivery plan with officers positively engaging in regional Communities of Practice to help improve understanding of good practice across the region.

- 2.2.2 Mutual Ventures, with the Innovation Unit, is working as the DfE delivery partner. They are supporting pathfinders with local delivery, as well as collecting and sharing learning with other local authorities.
- 2.2.3 The programme is independently evaluated by the National Children's Bureau alongside Verian and Alma Economics. The evaluation will support the DfE's understanding of the pathfinder and pilot areas by assessing implementation, delivery, impact and value for money.

## **2.3 Delivery Plan**

- 2.3.1 The Families First Programme Delivery Group, chaired by the Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services, is ensuring progress against the delivery plan. This meeting is monthly and is well attended with key officers from across the partnership including South Yorkshire Police, Health, and Education, along with local authority service areas.
- 2.3.2 The project team have reviewed other projects managed across the council and by partners to ensure the Families First Partnership Programme is in line with other change activity.

## **2.4 Co-Production**

- 2.4.1 A key focus of the Families First Partnership Programme is to review and refresh the Multi-Agency Threshold Guidance and Descriptors document. This work is underway.
- 2.4.2 The original document was co-produced by the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership and provides guidance for all practitioners working with children and families, who may be considering a referral to Children's Social Care services via the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- 2.4.3 It is expected by DfE that safeguarding partners work together to publish a refreshed threshold document to incorporate the changes of the Families First Partnership Programme and that this piece of work is co-produced.
- 2.4.4 The document should set out the level of need for children and the stages of Family Help to best support them.
- 2.4.5 The Participation Lead has contacted Voluntary Community Sector organisations to support this work and ensure it is accessible to families.
- 2.4.6 Practitioners across Rotherham will also be invited to contribute to this review providing their own knowledge and experience.
- 2.4.7 A refresh of the Multi-Agency Threshold Guidance and Descriptors document is expected to be published in June 2026.

## **2.5 Needs Assessment**

- 2.5.1 Officers within the RMBC Public Health team have undertaken a Needs Assessment on behalf of the programme and have reviewed data provided from Children and Young People Services (CYPS) and partners for the period July 2024 to June 2025.
- 2.5.2 The data that has emerged from the report, broadly reaffirms the position already understood by the CYPS directorate, which is encouraging. Domestic abuse is a main reason for concern when professionals and members of the public contact MASH, as is parental mental ill health and a need for parenting support. There is also a clear correlation between the areas of Rotherham which are most deprived and those where requests for support come from.
- 2.5.3 This assessment when combined with other data from partners provides a clear picture of where to provide services to engage families earlier, and this may include providing more targeted support, improving access to parenting programmes or seeking peer support.

## **2.6 Family Group Decision Making**

- 2.6.1 Work has started to review how Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) can be improved in Rotherham. FDGM is a voluntary, family-led process where relatives and other support networks create a plan to ensure a child's safety and wellbeing. This way of working supports families to identify their own solutions, reducing their reliance on services.
- 2.6.2 Rotherham is already successfully incorporating families into decision making using Family Network Meetings or Family Group Conferences. Both of these are forms of FGDM. This was reflected in the recent Ofsted Report published 16 December 2025
- 'Enabling more children to remain safely within their family networks with timely, targeted support that is making a measurable difference to their lives.'
  - 'Workers connect families and their network to services at the earliest opportunity.'
  - 'Family and friends' networks have usually already been explored by social workers, who recognise the importance of maintaining safe and familiar relationships and cultural identity.'
- 2.6.3 Key next steps for the development of the FGDM arrangements include;
- A simple explanation of the differences between Family Group Conferencing and Family Network Meetings for families to better understand why they might need one.
  - Improving how meetings are recorded and how these are reflected in systems.

## 2.7 Department for Education (DfE)

2.7.1 The Families First Partnership Programme remains fluid as new information, advice and policy statements continue to be shared by central Government. The Transformation Team will review all new guidance and seek direction from the Delivery Group as required.

2.7.2 The DfE has indicated new guidance will be available in the spring. This will be reviewed and any changes will be managed in line with the governance arrangements for the programme.

## 3. Recommendations

3.1 That Cabinet

1. Note the progress made since the last update on 17 November 2025.
2. Note the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant spend since the last update on 17 November 2025.

## 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 Families First Partnership Programme Delivery Group ensures all partners are consulted on progress. Further assurance of partner engagement is evidenced through the secondment agreements in place for Police, Health, and Education, respectively.

## 5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 A further update in relation to the progress of the Families First Partnership Programme will be presented to Cabinet when the proposed new model of working has been finalised by the Service and wider partnership.

## 6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 The Children's Social Care Prevention Grant has been fully committed for 2025/26. The table below outlines the planned expenditure 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	£344,677
2	Secondments from Partner organisations	£150,000
		<b>£494,667</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's Social Care - enhancing multi-agency child protection teams / safeguarding arrangements	£250,000
12	ICT Developments - to support single system information / data sharing	£220,535
13	Further investment in Integrated Working and Outreach and Engagement	£352,512
		<b>£1,666,201</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	£30,000
		<b>£49,484</b>
	<b>Total commitments to date</b>	<b>£2,210,352</b>

- 6.2 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. To date all required grant returns to the DfE have been completed on time and accepted.
- 6.3 There is no direct procurement implications associated with the recommendations detailed in this report. Where there is a need to procure third party suppliers to support the delivery of this programme this must be done in compliance with relevant legislation (Public Contracts Regulations, 2015 or the Procurement Act

2023) dependent on the route to market selected as well as the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.

## **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 Lead Practitioner (FHLP), further progress around family group decision-making, establishing multi-agency child protection arrangements and implementing 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 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 Other than recruitment to any additional posts required to support service delivery, there are no HR implications highlighted in this report.

## **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. Any equality implications arising from a full analysis of the Needs Assessment will be considered by the Families First Partnership Programme Delivery Group and where required commission engagement of voluntary community sector organisations who work at the heart of communities in Rotherham to support.

## 11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 Implications included in the Carbon Impact Assessment.

## 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, Service Director – Family Help  
 Rob Savage, Strategic Programme Lead (Families First Programme)

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	<b>Named Officer</b>	<b>Date</b>
Chief Executive	John Edwards	26/02/26
Executive Director Corporate Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	26/02/26
Service Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	26/02/26

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