

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	09 December 2025
Title of Report:	Families First Partnership Programme of Reforms
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Lisa Davies
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Your Reference:	Click here to enter text.
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

To update Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Board Members of the requirements of the delivery of the Government's National Family First Reforms and progress of their implementation in Plymouth.

To provide the opportunity for Scrutiny Board Members to question, challenge and scrutinise the implementation of the Reforms in Plymouth.

Recommendations and Reasons

For the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel to note the progress made and the implementation of next steps in Plymouth.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. None

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Keeping children safe is a priority within the Corporate Plan.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Improved practice will lead to better value for money interventions for families.

Financial Risks

The implementation of the reforms increases demand for services locally.

Legal Implications

None

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

None

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

None.

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	N/A	Leg	N/A	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Lisa Davies											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 01/12/2025											
Cabinet Member approval:											
Approved by email											
Date approved: 28/11/2025											

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the Government and the Children's Services sector have been working to improve and reform the children's social care system. Several recent reports and reviews set out key priorities for improving the children's social care system:

- The [Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(2022\)](#) examined the experience and outcomes of children and young people who interact with the children's social care system, from Early Help through to child protection arrangements and the care system. It recommended fundamental reforms across the national children's safeguarding system.
- The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's National Review into [Child Protection in England \(2022\)](#) cited system-wide, multi-agency failures in child protection following its review into the circumstances leading up to the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson. Also leading onto the Stable Homes Built on Love which is the foundation of the reforms [Children's social care: stable homes, built on love - GOV.UK](#)
- **The Families First for Children Pathfinder (FFCP)** was established to test the deliverability of key recommendations from these reviews. It was designed to improve support and protection for children and families through earlier intervention, stronger multi-agency collaboration, and a more integrated approach to service delivery.

1. The Families First Partnership Programme

The Families First Partnership Programme is therefore a national programme set up by the Department for Education (DfE) and supported by the Department of Health and Social Care and the Home Office.

As part of the social care reforms all Local Authorities are expected by the DfE to implement the governments reform of children's social care by transforming help and protection systems. Implementing multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams that work in a place-based way will be a key enabler to both the implementation of the reforms and to Plymouth children's services continued improvement.

The initiative is to prioritise early intervention, collaboration and family support, backed by a funding allocation for Local Authorities to deliver a whole systems wide transformation.

There are four key reform strands to be delivered as a whole system transformation:

Safeguarding Partners

- Strengthening the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA), which Plymouth has already fully included representation from education and child care settings at all levels of MASA so that opportunities to keep children safe are not missed. Noting locally an education representative has also taken on roles of Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSP) and Lead Safeguarding Partner (LSP) showing a strong commitment to Education being a 4th key partner.
- A newly implemented Families First Partnership Board now reports to the Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership (PSCP) enabling both DSPs and LSPs to be part of the governance and cementing strong partnership commitment.
- Establishing new, expert-led, Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPT), integrated within Family Help, to identify significant harm, deliver core statutory child protection functions, and offer expert advice across the wider local system is also expected. Locally we have secured Partnership agreement to have one central city-wide team to address this requirement.

Family Help and protection

- Creating single Family Help assessments and plans, to identify needs and capture the services to be provided for children and families, of which progress has commenced as part of the workstream activity to deliver a single Family Help Assessment and Plan.
- Streamlining and supporting effective multi-agency information sharing and case management systems.
- Establishing the Family Help Lead Practitioner (FHLP) role ensuring consistency of relationships between children, families and their lead practitioner. Again, locally these roles have been developed in Targeted Help and our plans will be to roll this out into one seamless approach including Children's Social Work teams.
- Reforming the approach to the 'front door' – bringing together professionals and services (i.e., SEND) to an integrated, multi-agency front door model where children and families can be triaged to the right level of service at the first point of contact. This has been a significant focus for the Plymouth partnership and great commitment, and resource is already in place and delivering a Families First approach through the Families First Integrated Front Door.
- Combining the strengths of targeted Early Help and Section 17 (Child in Need) work into a single, seamless Family Help service, with flexibility on who leads direct work with families to support relationship building, whilst ensuring child protection concerns are still identified and receive a quick and decisive multiagency response.

Multi-agency child protection

- Creating an integrated system where Family Help Lead Practitioners work alongside MACPTs.
- Establishing multi-agency child protection teams to carry out core, statutory child protection functions, strengthen frontline practice with social workers and embed a Lead Child Protection Practitioners in the MACPT teams, advise and guide the wider system, and engage parents and carers to keep children safe.
- Introducing new Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCP) roles who are experienced social workers, responsible for statutory child protection decisions and embedded in the multi-agency child protection team.

Family Networks

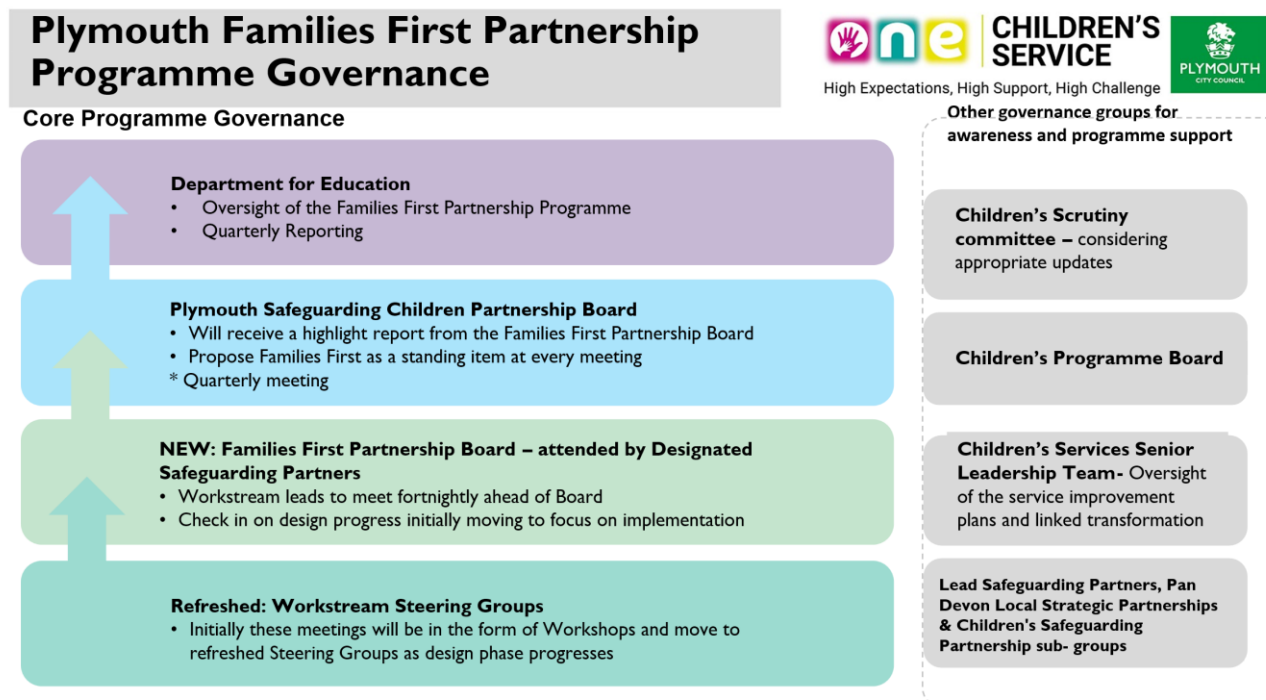
- Engaging and empowering parents and family networks involved in child protection, including via parental representation.
- Introduce new Family Network Support Packages (FNSPs) to provide practical and financial support to enable family networks to help children stay safe and thrive at home.
- Establishing a system-wide, 'families first' culture, which addresses structural inequalities, attends to the full spectrum of families' contexts and needs, and facilitates a welcoming and effective system for children and families.
- Engaging and involving children and families in design and delivery.
- Embedding Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) and establishing MACPTs in every local area.

A new ringfenced Children's Social Care Prevention Grant has been implemented, to support all local areas to roll out many of the reforms. This investment will be delivered as a national programme, Families First Partnership programme, overseen by DfE and rolled out to all local areas in England and their local partners (including police, health and education), with transformation from April 2025.

2. Local Implementation Arrangements

The reforms have been welcomed as a key part of the next phase of improving outcomes for children and families. Local governance arrangements have been reviewed and strengthened with a new FFPB agreed to report into the Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership and Partnership Working

Groups established to progress priority areas. The governance structure for the implementation of the reforms is in place and is set out below:



The first FFPB meeting was held on 9th October and the subsequent one on 25th November and both have had good Partnership representation and engagement. Boards will be held every 6 weeks.

The detailed delivery plan for the Reforms will be developed by the Working Groups, with project management support. The Groups have all been established, with the initial meetings held and fortnightly meetings diarised to ensure the necessary pace. The working group structure can be seen below:



A summary of each of the areas of activity is provided below:

a) Families Front Door

Developing effective multi-disciplinary arrangements to ensure families get the right help and/or protection at the right time. A conversation based integrated front door, 'Families First Front Door', has been in place since early June and has recently moved into new accommodation on the fourth floor to enable increased involvement of partners. Initial evaluation has identified improved feedback from families of the new approaches. In the next phase the multi-disciplinary approach will be developed further to further increase access to earlier help and the digital offer to families will be improved.

b) Family Help and Protection

In order to developing a seamless system of support and protection for families when it is needed initial service redesign has been implemented. Family Help Lead Practitioners are in place, supporting families with targeted early help and child in need support, to ensure families with multiple needs receive earlier, joined-up and non-stigmatising support to enable them to stay together. Teams are working closely together to ensure that when child protection concerns are identified they are responded to effectively by a qualified social worker but maintaining relationship-based approaches wherever possible. The next phase will include the development of single assessment and the development of locality family help arrangements with partners.

c) Family Led Decision Making

A Family Group Conferencing offer is already in place for families in Plymouth and we are committed to utilising family decision making models from early in our involvement with families to ensure we are working restoratively with families and building capacity within the family network, this includes for families in pre-proceedings. In addition, we have been developing social workers confidence in holding Family Network Meetings to maximise family support networks in plans as part of their involvement with a family. The service has been recently extended to enable these approaches to be offered to more families. In the next phase we will ensure all families benefit from this 'families first' approach, particularly reaching all families where there is a risk of legal proceedings).

d) Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs)

The Bill will insert new sections into the Children Act 2004 to require safeguarding partners to establish and run at least one multi-agency child protection team in their area. The main purpose of these new teams is to support deliver of child protection duties under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Integrated Care Boards will be required to nominate a health professional with experience in relation to children's health, while the police will be required to nominate an officer to be part of each multi-agency child protection team. The Local Authority is required to nominate someone with experience in education in relation to children and to establish Lead Child Protection Practitioners (social worker with experience in relation to child protection) to oversee key decision making and support practice and may appoint other appropriate individuals after consultation with safeguarding partners.

The three key safeguarding Partners are already working well together locally, to ensure strong oversight of the safeguarding system and the inclusion of Education as a fourth partner is welcomed. We welcome the opportunity to develop a multi-agency child protection team to further strengthen local arrangements and are currently planning local codesign activities and confirming a timeline for local implementation, including identifying the key partners and capacity to deliver expectations of the Lead Child Protection Practitioner effectively. Exact function and resource requirements are being confirmed with partners, alongside a clear plan for implementation.

Local arrangements are being explored by the working group informed by the input from the engagement events. Please see section 3 (Latest FFP Board Decisions) for detail on the decisions taken on the MACPT implementation for Plymouth.

e) Workforce Development

Recognising that the Partnership workforce is key in delivering the reforms, this Working Group will develop Plymouth's response to the following:

- What are the key areas where workforce development is needed to support the reforms?
- What is needed from partners and how do we engage the right people?
- What workforce development is needed to achieve the expectations of the Family Help Lead Practitioner and Lead Child Protection Practitioner?
- How do we support the workforce to achieve new ways of working effectively across Help and Protection?
- How will we monitor and evaluate impact?

3. Latest FFP Board Decisions and Next Steps

- **A single MACPT function on a citywide basis in place by 1st April 26** – it will continue to develop beyond March but must have the minimum expectation set out by DfE to include police, LCPP, Health and Education. The MACPT is a distinct service from the Front Door, not an extension of it (confirmed by the DfE). Note: The FFP Board could not approve the resourcing for this until the detail has been developed which is the next step now agreement is for a city-wide service.
- **LCPPs in place and delivering conferences differently** – Agreement to review the current CP Chair role and commence consultation end of January 2026 to help gradually transition to full LCPP role. The Board approved the recommendation that IROs take on the LCPP role and the next steps to implement this. The board noted the financial challenge for the local authority that the LCPPs are not fully funded and to enable direct work will require more resource.
- **PCC Children & Families service restructured into neighbourhood teams** to enable us to deliver the reforms – Work still ongoing to determine what the neighbourhoods look like, including with partners to align with their own locality working plans. The Family Group Conferencing (FGC) service moves to the QA & Safeguarding Partnership Team within the re-structure to meet the DfE guidance of providing FGC's to those under child protection plans and in Pre-Proceedings.
- **Single assessment and single plan to be implemented by 1st April** - The Board recognised this intention but also acknowledged the high risk of not achieving this because of the expert capacity required which is highlighted as a red risk facing the programme.
- **Secondments for FFP** – The Board acknowledged the challenges for this area and agreed to continue working successfully with committed partnership resource for consistency, rather than progressing the secondments from Partner organisations. Risk added to the log about particular financial and capacity pressures in the health system.

The Board also agreed the following next steps as priorities:

- Provide recommendations for capacity required to deliver the city-wide MACPT and agree detailed resource and roles and functions required.
- Prevention approach to be agreed for Neighbourhood Teams and how Early Help is integrated.
- Agreement of what Multi Agency Line of sight looks like across practice including Targeted Help.
- Project milestones to be presented and agreed.
- Vision statement for families to be approved (following family and staff engagement).

- Plans approved for family engagement, co-production and feedback, along with branding children and young people are working on.

4. Corporate Support Requirements

This is a significant and complex whole service redesign and change process requiring system redesign, development of new working practices and resources and a comprehensive programme of workforce development, including with partners.

To successfully achieve the objectives of the programme to the required timeline, cross council support is required in a number of specific areas including;

1. **HR-OD** - support for the organisational redesign and change management that will be required, including the creation of the FHLP and LCPP roles and transitions to new ways of working and changes to role profiles and terms and conditions in key areas.
2. **System development** – support to make the changes to the Eclipse case management system to support new ways of working, new reporting and new team structures.
3. **Commissioning** - support to review existing contracts and ensure commissioned services are in place to deliver the services and outcomes needed, including joint commissioning arrangements with partners when needed.
4. **Performance data** – changes to performance management, KPIs and reporting arrangements aligned to new ways of working and priority outcomes of the programme.
5. **Policies and procedures** – capacity to develop the systems and guidance to clarify expected practices and processes to support the reforms.
6. **Communications** – capacity to develop and deliver programmes of both internal and external communications to staff, partners families and the wider community.

There is Corporate commitment across the Council to support the successful delivery of the Implementation of the Programme in Plymouth.

Engagement

These are wide ranging reforms across Children's Services, not just within Local Authorities, and therefore engagement with stakeholders is crucial to its successful implementation. A scene setting session for strategic leaders across the system was held on 21st October with good attendance from the Council, Education, Police and Health. Rich discussions on each of the key areas of the reforms, as well as locality working, were held. A series of staff engagement events for wider staff from across the Partnership have been put in place and six out of seven of these have been delivered. Nearly 300 staff have attended so far with 80 booked onto the remaining session. Senior officers from Health and the Police have supported these events facilitating group discussions. All have had good multi-agency representation and fruitful discussion which are informing the vision and delivery plan for the Reforms. Further engagement with Health and Designated Safeguarding Leads within schools are being planned.

It is recognised that engagement with children, young people and families is vital to make these reforms a success and the approach to this is being developed within the delivery plan. The reforms were also presented as an agenda item at the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership Conference on 20th November.

5. Risks and Monitoring

Successfully implementing such wide-ranging reforms, especially in the current climate of significant financial pressures, inevitably carries risk. Review of known risks and scanning for new ones is regularly

undertaken through the project management process, with risks which cannot be sufficiently mitigated or managed being escalated through the governance process. The current most significant programme risks were presented to the Families First Partnership Board on 25th November and include:

Risk Title	Description
System development	Insufficiency capacity to complete the system changes required by April 1st. Mitigation this is being escalated by the DCS to find a solution with the Corporate Team.
Partnership engagement and contribution	Current Health changes and budget cuts may impact on capacity to engage in and achieve planned changes. Specifically, ICB restructure and staff reduction, government requirements about Integrated Neighbourhood MDTs and waiting list reduction targets. All partners financial positions are very pressured. Mitigation - this will be kept under close review.
Insufficient capacity in FFP leadership	There is a risk of insufficient capacity at a senior level to do all that is required by 1st April 2025 because of competing roles and responsibilities. In addition, because all chairs and members of the Working Groups have busy operational roles, there is risk of insufficient capacity to complete all the activities in the emerging delivery plan. Similar pressures are being experienced by health, police, education and other partners. Mitigation is that permanent recruitment is taking place for the Permanent Service Director: Children, Young People and Families and committed SRO to remain in post to ensure stability in the reforms. Discussions continue with Transformation Director to discuss Programme support.

The overall pace of change required by the Reforms also poses a risk. The nationally directed go-live date for the Reforms is 1st April 2026 although it is acknowledged that activity to embed them will continue past this date. The Local Authority is required to meet with and make quarterly returns to the DfE to demonstrate progress. The Q2 Delivery Plan meeting has been held with the DfE and the Q2 monitoring return completed on time. Preparation for the Q3 return, which includes the requirement for the full delivery plan, has now commenced. Delivery partner support has been agreed and is being delivered by Mutual Ventures through the DfE.