

Families First for Children Wave Two Pathfinder Programme

Portfolio: Councillor Elson – Children’s

Related portfolios:

Service: Children’s Services

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Aim

To provide Cabinet with an overview of the Families First for Children Wave Two Pathfinder (henceforth the ‘Families First Programme’), and the key actions and areas of work which will be undertaken to deliver this programme.

2. Summary

- 2.1. This report provides an overview of the Families First Programme. This paper is presented to set out the Families First Programme proposals now that the Delivery Plan and Costed Plan has been developed, and to outline the opportunities that this presents.
- 2.2. The sponsor for the Families First Programme will be Executive Director for Children’s Services, Colleen Male.
- 2.3. The detailed Delivery Plan and Costed Plan for the programme carries significant potential benefits in the delivery of services for children and families, and making sure they receive the right help for their needs. If successful, this will build on the implementation of the Family Safeguarding Programme and is about creating better outcomes for children and their families by meeting needs at the earliest opportunity through coordinated multi-agency services working together as closely as possible with families, as well as with their networks and with communities. For many families, this will mean they receive the right help escalation of families through statutory systems. This could lead to a safe reduction in the numbers of children entering care and of care numbers overall, and where children of those who enter care support, it will enable more to live in their family and community networks. This will in turn have significant financial benefits through the year-on-year reduction of cost pressures for placements. Initial modelling based on a moderate reduction of children in care profiles potential savings of £3.47m over the next 4 years. This is not the full modelling of the financial impact and potential savings and benefits of the Families First Programme, and a cost benefit analysis model for this is being

developed. This will capture a range of other benefits and savings for families not escalating through Children's social Care systems. This figure sets out how the programme will enable a safe reduction of the numbers of children in care, and the significant financial impact of this.

- 2.4 The programme does require significant investment. A £2.23m grant has been provided to the local authority by the Department for Education (DfE) to implement the reforms. Appendix One provides the costed Plan that sets out how the £2.23m grant will be used. The current grant guidance suggests that the grant funding must be fully spent by 31st March 2025, however the grant is a Section 31 grant therefore it is understood that any funds not spent by the end of the financial year can be carried forward to the following financial year as long as they are fully committed.
- 2.5 To continue the Families First Programme in the future as set out in the Delivery Plan, and as per the requirements of the DfE, continued investment will be required. There are ongoing conversations with the DfE about the continuation of the programme, and the very basis of the programme is that Walsall and others are 'Pathfinder' authorities for what will become national reforms. However, at this stage, there is no clear established position about what happens following 31st March 2025. It is requested that the investment needed is factored into Budget setting for 2025/26 to enable the Families First Programme to continue. The total amount will be equivalent to the £2.23m awarded, to provide a basis for the ongoing conversations with the DfE. However, there will be contingencies built in to review the impact of the Families First Programme, and understand the investment required to realise substantial cost savings, and to assess the impact of different strands of Families First Pathfinder activity and to decide what to keep and what not to keep.
- 2.6 In order to be able to successfully recruit resources needed to enable the programme, fixed term contracts of at least 1 year will need to be created. The grant in this financial year covers the costs for circa 7 months employment in 2024/25; therefore, funding for the remaining 5 months will be needed in 2025/26. If no further external funding is received, there is a risk to the local authority of £818k to fund these remaining costs. Decisions around the future plans for these roles will be made following further confirmation of future funding and a review of which aspects of the Families First Programme have been successful, and which posts will be required after 31/03/25.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 3.1 Approves the Families First Wave Two Pathfinder Programme;
- 3.2 Delegates authority to the Executive Director for Children's Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, to subsequently sign contracts or other related documents and to authorise any variations to the contractual arrangements should this be required;

- 3.3 Notes the initial overview and activity, the proposed structure, financial plan and implications for future budget setting.

4. Report detail - know

Context

- 4.1 The Families First Programme is an exciting opportunity to lead national level reforms of Children's Services and partnership working to protect children and help and support families. The programme is a central feature of the government's 'Children's Social Care Strategy Stable Homes Built on Love'.
- 4.2 Stable Homes Built on love responds to recommendations from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, completed in 2022. It also responds to key outcomes from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report on Child Protection in England and the Competitions and Market Authority's Market Study of Children's Social Care Provision.
- 4.3 The central contention of the Independent Review was that a radical shift in Children's Social Care is required, for families to receive responsive, respectful, and effective support, at the earliest possible point. This support should draw on the strengths and resilience of family and community networks, and move away from processes which are professionally led, and require hand off and multiple, overlapping interventions by different services.
- 4.4 It is argued in the Independent Review that at present we have:
- 'a system increasingly skewed to crisis intervention, with outcomes for children that continue to be unacceptably poor and costs that continue to rise... Without a dramatic whole system reset, outcomes for children and families will remain stubbornly poor and by this time next decade there will be approaching 100,000 children in care (up from 80,000 today) and a flawed system will cost over £15 billion per year (up from £10 billion now). Together, the changes we recommend will shift these trends and would mean 30,000 more children living safely and thriving with their families by 2032 compared to the current trajectory.'
- 4.5 The Families First Programme is about implementing the fundamental changes identified in the Independent Review to help families sooner, drawing on the strengths of family and community networks, and to act decisively and purposefully where children are identified as at risk of harm or experiencing abuse. This sits within getting multi-agency arrangements right, and change cannot just be about any one organisation but the whole system. The Families First Programme has four key reforms strands:
- Family help
 - Child protection
 - Family networks
 - Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

- 4.6 Three local authorities were approached to be Wave One Pathfinders to develop and test reforms based on these four strands. Those local authorities are Dorset, Lincolnshire and Wolverhampton.
- 4.7 Local authorities were invited to bid to become Wave Two Pathfinders, commencing in April 2024 with implementation commencing in July 2024. This was a highly competitive process with the indication being that nationally seven local authorities would be selected, including two local authorities from a grouping of the East Midlands, West Midlands and South-West. In March 2024 Walsall received confirmation that they had been successful in their bid to be a Wave 2 Families First Pathfinder.
- 4.8 Walsall's bid was founded on building on current strong partnership relationships as identified in Walsall's JTAI Inspection in November 2022 - (ofsted.gov.uk) and developing further a strong multi-agency offer to help and support families through the Family Safeguarding Model and our Early Help Offer. The strengths of these approaches provided the foundation for the proposed programmatic reforms to implement multi-agency systems centred on relational family help, and rigorous, timely child protection practice.
- 4.9 The Families First Programme represents an exciting opportunity for Walsall Council and Children's Services to be at the forefront of sector-wide reforms, to design and test those reforms and support their implementation nationally. Walsall is well placed to learn from the Wave One Pathfinders, but also to innovate focus on getting this right for Walsall and the needs of our children and families, centred on our service provision models.
- 4.10 The programme provides opportunity to create a system-wide delivery model and ethos, building on strengths in service areas. It also provides opportunities for investment to deliver sustainable service improvement and changes which will mean children and families receive the right help as soon as possible.
- 4.11 The key project timescales to date have been that a Wave 2 Delivery Plan and Costed Plan was provided to the DfE by the 31/05/24 setting out how the Programme Design Specification will be fully realised across the four key reform strands. This plan has been reviewed by the DfE and endorsed, and the programme will formally commence on the 1st July 2024, running until 31st March 2025.
- 4.12 The programme is a Test and Learn approach, with an emphasis on local authorities designing and delivering reforms and continuing to learn and develop thinking and practices across the Pathfinder period. It is anticipated that aspects of the programme will change and evolve based on learning, feedback and analysis of implementation of reforms. The proposals in Walsall's Delivery Plan under the four reform strands will now be briefly set out.
- 4.13 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

A project team has been established including senior local authority officers from Children's Social Care and Early Help Services, and Strategic Leads for

the Police, Health Services and Education. Other key posts include a Senior Systems Development Lead, a Practice Development Lead, an Outcomes and Performance Lead, and a Participation Lead have also been established.

These project team arrangements will enable the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements elements of the Design Specification to be met through work undertaken with the Walsall Safeguarding Children's Partnership, and leaders and practitioners within different organisations in the partnership. The Families First Programme is a partnership endeavour, and engaging professionals from across the partnership will be essential to the programme's success. This will include enhancing the strategic and operational role of education in safeguarding arrangements and practice and developing a shared Families First practice framework to align values, language and practices.

Children's, parents', and family members' voices are at the heart of the Families First Programme. The Big Conversation has been a key feature of the Walsall Right 4 Children Programme, and this sits at the heart of the Families First Programme. The Big Conversation includes a wide-ranging consultation programme to engage with parents and families who have had support from Children's Social Care and Early Help Services. A series of activities is being undertaken, from a broad exercise to seek feedback from all parents and families, to in-depth engagement activities and collaborative design workshops to be undertaken across the Pathfinder period.

In addition to the Big Conversation, a parallel 'Big Consultation' is being undertaken to engage with our staff and with professionals across the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership. This approach is intended firstly to seek their views and to recognise how it is essential their practice wisdom shapes the Families First reforms. Second, this consultation programme is itself significant in developing a collaborative approach to multi-agency working and to getting professionals together to build a shared ethos and practices.

4.14 Family Help

Walsall has a co-located locality offer, with targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care services for families currently based in four locality hubs. Targeted Early Help services are multi-agency, with key partners including 0-19 Health Services, locality and school policing, targeted Youth Workers DWP and Benefits Support, Housing, Independent Domestic Abuse Workers, Reducing Parental Conflict and Parenting Support. Family Safeguarding has been the practice model for Children's Social Care for over three years. This includes multi-agency help to families delivered through Adult Specialist Practitioners including Independent Domestic Abuse Workers, Domestic Abuse Officers who work with perpetrators of abuse, Substance Recovery Workers and a mental health team. These teams operate a hybrid model and are physically co-located one or two days a week.

Multi-agency Family Help Teams will be developed through aligning the targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care locality teams to create an integrated locality Family Help Services. The Family Help Service will consist

of a wide range of practitioners, with recruitment to address key identified areas of need:

- Vulnerable Adolescents Practitioners
- Youth and Community Workers
- Best Start 0-5 Practitioners
- School Inclusion Officer
- Mental Health Practitioner

Alongside Family Networks below, Family Help accordingly forms the most significant staffing ask for the Pathfinder.

Another key ask is in respect of the training budget to train and develop our own staff to develop areas of specialist knowledge and expertise. Key areas for family help support will be reviewed – such as domestic abuse, mental health, substance misuse – to enhance and develop our service offers. The aim will be to provide responsive multi-agency support across the spectrum of families where there are family help needs.

The operating model for Early Help and Children's Social Care will be further developed to provide the framework for a Family Help model. This will include:

- A focus on consistent relationships for all children and families. Where additional help is needed, this will be delivered through a Family Help Lead Practitioner who will generally remain with the family as the allocated caseworker.
- As children's and family's needs escalate or decrease, additional multi-agency professionals will join and step back from a Team Around the Family.
- The current processes and thresholds for children and families to 'Step Up and Step Down' from services will be replaced with an integrated Locality Conversations model, which is about identifying the right support for children and families as soon as possible.
- All children and families where there are identified levels of need will receive Family Help support. Children who are a 'child in need' and a 'child in need of protection' will still be identified and will receive intensive Family Help support.
- Supervision arrangements will be reviewed so that all children and families, receive multi-agency Family Help Supervision coordinated by a suitably qualified Team Manager.
- The principals of the Family Safeguarding model will be expanded to provide a practice framework for Family Help. The approaches for assessment, collaborative supervision, and case discussion and recording in Family Safeguarding have been shown to provide a strong foundation for effective multi-agency practice, and these will be developed across the remodelled Family Help Service.

A fundamental feature of this approach is how Family Help Teams integrate with Family Hubs, and other community and Early Help Services. Locality Family Help Services will be co-located with Family Hubs, and a joined-up needs-led model of service provision will look to understand and meet childrens' and family needs at the earliest point, with universal services and early support services being connected to family help services, and increasing support being available to reflect increasing family needs. Community, VCS and early support services are already aligned with Early Help Services and individual locality offers. The Families First Programme will include a wide-ranging commissioning, community and voluntary sector engagement exercise. This will map local support services and networks, and to look to identify gaps and meet needs.

4.15 Family Networks

There are two key aspects of how family networks will be placed at the heart of the Pathfinder. The first is through the development of a Family Service to deliver a service wide offer for Family Network Meetings and Family Group Conferences, and to provide intensive out-of-hours family outreach support. The second is through the provision of Family Network Support Packages.

Family Network Meetings and Family Groups Conferences have been a key model in delivering Families First services. This is because they have been a central feature in improving practice and outcomes for children and families in some local authorities that have successfully embedded these approaches in their standard working practices (ref). There is an ethical case as Family Network Meetings and Group Conferences can empower families and put them at the heart of decision-making to develop their own help plans. This is shown to increase how meaningfully engaged and supported children, parents and family members feel when they are involved with children's services (refs). In turn, this has been demonstrated to help prevent families from escalating through Children's Social Care, to reduce the numbers of children coming into care, and increase the numbers of children who are able to live with a member of their family or community network (refs).

Walsall has an existing Family Network offer; however, the intention is to be ambitious in expanding this. This will be an offer across the Family Help Service, for all families. Every family will receive the offer of a Family Network Meeting or Family Groups Conference alongside allocation of a lead practitioner in the Family Help Service, and this will be centred on their needs.

Another key aspect of this proposal is how support can be provided by Children's Social Care and Early Help to families outside of normal working hours and when more intensive outreach support is needed, especially at points of crisis. A key aim of service development is to support families to prevent crisis occurring through effective targeted support. There will also be families where intensive interventions are required, including high frequency out of hours support. For many children, this support will be preventative to enable a child to remain living at home or with family. For some children coming into care

is the right outcome, and this support will be about managing this transition, so moving into care can where possible occur in a planned way to an identified home that can best meet the child's needs.

To achieve these aims, the proposal is to create a new Family Service of 14 practitioners and managers. This is an ambitious proposal. It is modelled on the needs for families who become supported by Children's Social Care and Early Help Services and being able to offer Family Network Meetings and Family Group Conferences across the service, as well as to respond to families with high levels of need.

The second aspect of the proposals is the use of Family Network Support Packages. These are packages of financial support provided to meet children's needs and mobilise family networks to come together and provide help to the family in ways that would not be otherwise possible. A framework for how these can be most effectively used and for consistency and accountability is being finalised. The bid for the Pathfinder requires that 25% of the total funding is provided for Family Networks equating to £558k. In turn, 75% of this funding has to be spent on Family Network Support Packages equating to £418k. This budget has been assigned to this activity in our costed plan. It is ambitious but also has the scope to be transformative in respect of delivering and understanding the impact of direct funding provided to families.

A case for the sustainability of Family Network Support Packages will need to be developed through an analysis of the impact for children and families. If they are effective in providing families with support at an early stage and preventing more costly local authority interventions, then a business case will be developed for their continued use.

4.16 Child Protection

The key requirements of the Child Protection reform strand are parental advocacy - to establish a Multi-Agency Child Protection Team and to test out the role of Lead Child Protection Practitioners. Lead Practitioners are proposed as being experienced, non-caseholding social workers who will support and drive standards in child protection as well as leading Section 47 Child Protection enquiries and chairing Child Protection Conferences.

Parental advocacy within child protection forms part of a wide-ranging programme of participation activity across the Programme. A key requirement is specifically to test parental advocacy in Child Protection Conferences. Commissioning opportunities are currently being explored.

The Multi-Agency Child Protection Team is proposed as a virtual, networked team. This is about developing systems and practices with partners: in particular, the police, health, and probation services to provide an expert network of child protection leads and specialists. This network will provide support to frontline practitioners dealing with Child Protection Enquiries, have oversight of child protection across the borough, and support the development of child protection training, systems, and practices. A key feature of this is to

focus on how child protection needs to be a multi-agency endeavour where agencies are able to work together collaboratively and purposefully on a day-to-day basis.

The new Lead Child Protection Practitioners will form a key part of this multi-agency team. The aim in testing the role will be to start smaller in scale, review, learn and expand the role across child protection practice if it is successful. The role will work alongside the allocated social worker to lead Child Protection Enquiries and will be focused on our most vulnerable children. The proposal for the Pathfinder period is to recruit 3 Lead Child Protection Practitioners, and to convert some existing roles, to be able to test out the changes and understand their impact. The role has significant potential to significantly enhance child protection enquiries and practice. The investment required has been based on modelling on current and projected workloads and creating scope to work differently to improve practice.

5. Council Plan priorities

- 5.1 The Pathfinder programme will provide a significant opportunity to develop services for vulnerable children and families in Walsall, impacting on the Council Plan priority that children 'have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well'. It continues the transformation work that is being undertaken through the Walsall Right 4 Children programme which focusses on the aspiration that every child and family in Walsall is understood, feels happy and safe, with a strong sense of belonging enabling them to learn, achieve and succeed.
- 5.2 The Pathfinder reforms, especially in respect of Family Help, are about ensuring that all children and families who need additional help for children to thrive receive that help from the right professional who they can develop a relationship with and have consistent support from. As needs increase or situations change, the level of support will increase but remain coordinated by a consistent professional. Children and families will be encouraged to work with their wider family and community networks, and to identify the help they need from professionals and services.
- 5.3 Pathfinder directly contributes to the below Council plan outcomes and markers of success:
 - Outcome 7 – Children and young people thrive emotionally, physically, mentally and feel they are achieving their potential.
 - Marker of success 13 - Children and young people have access to high quality education and training opportunities and schools are more inclusive.
 - Marker of success 14 - Children and young people with additional needs or in specific circumstances are identified and supported to have their health and education needs met.
 - Outcome 8 - Children and young people grow up in connected communities and feel safe everywhere.

- Marker of success 15 - Services and support are responsive to needs of different communities, partners are proactive in responding to these needs and children and families have easier and timelier access to services.
- Marker of success 16 - Children and families are better connected with community resources to enable them to build resilience, are involved in developing their plans and can provide regular feedback.

5.4 Participation of the Pathfinder creates opportunities to elevate Walsall’s public profile. This will potentially enhance recruitment opportunities across the system from fostering to practitioner recruitment as it will make Walsall appealing as an innovative place to work and do business with. A communication and marketing strategy will be built into the overall project plan.

6. Risk management

6.1 As with any programme, the implementation of Pathfinder will introduce key risks outlined below in Table 1 – these will be managed, mitigated and monitored throughout the duration of the programme. The success of this project plan is dependent on this work being prioritised across the workforce, having the right arrangements in place, and to be supported effectively by wider council services and systems.

Key Risk	Mitigation
The Pathfinder Programme involves an intensive period of change that will impact across Children’s Services, but in particular Children’s Social Care and Early Help Services. This may be disruptive and whilst initial feedback from staff is they recognise the opportunity this brings, it will create anxieties.	This needs to be managed through coordinated project management so that staff are and engaged and consulted throughout the change management process, and briefed and prepared for changes as they are implemented.
There is a level of risk that the Pathfinder Reforms can impact on service delivery. For example, a move to an integrated Family Help model could result in increased referrals and demand on services	What is key here is the project and change management process, and that changes are carefully considered, consulted and tested. A central feature of the Pathfinder Programme is to trial reforms and learn, and there is scope to iteratively design and develop, and to test reforms as they are implemented. To return to the example just given, this will mean: understanding and benchmarking current data and trends, creation of new policy and process in consultation and collaboration with frontline practitioners, introducing

	these changes in a coordinated way, with a clear communicated and quality assurance plan, with a cycle of analysis and refinement and adaptation as required. This process of continual learning will be central to the implementation of the Pathfinder.
There is a risk that the Pathfinder could negative impact on partnership arrangements and relationships, if it is regarded that reforms involve Children’s Social care moving statutory responsibilities to other agencies. On the other hand, if the reforms are implemented well with partners, they could have a significant positive impact, creating a shared framework for partners working together to meet statutory responsibilities for all organisations as set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.	This will be mitigated through a strong programme board which will be supported by a communications plan to ensure all changes are clearly understood as to both their implementation and rationale.
There is a risk that the Pathfinder investment requires financial commitments from the local authority for the financial year 2025-26 because the Pathfinder period only runs until the end of the 2024-25 financial year, and service delivery and changes will need to continue beyond this point.	These risks can be mitigated through how the proposals are embedded and with continued review of the Pathfinder budget position as set out below. There is also the potential for significant financial benefit from the investment that could result in overall savings and costs avoided.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The Pathfinder grant is aimed at providing investment to support Local Authorities in testing reforms and creating sustainable change. It is believed that these reforms will improve family help and early help services to support ongoing cost reductions linked to Children in Care.

The total grant funding allocated to Walsall for the Pathfinder Programme in 2024/25 is £2.23m. The grant conditions specify that 25% of the total grant must be spent on Family Networks (£558k) and 75% of this should be spent on Family Network Support Packages which provide direct financial assistance to families (£418k).

- 7.2 A costed plan has been submitted to the Department for Education on 31st May 2024 as shown in the table below. Further detail is also included in Appendix One.

Reform Strand	Staffing costs (7 months)	Staffing costs (12 months)	Non-staffing / Commissioning costs	Total
Project Costs and Multi-Agency Arrangements		£422,218	£301,000 (Training budget)	£723,218
Family Help	£557,612		£86,601 (Equipment and mileage)	£644,213
Family Networks	£284,898		£418,125 (Family Network Support packages)	£703,023
Child Protection	£129,547		£30,000 (Parental Advocacy)	£159,547
			Total	£2,230,000

- 7.3 The grant has been awarded for 2024/25 and guidance suggests that all funding should be fully spent by 31st March 2025. Conversations have been had with the DfE to confirm the understanding of the guidance, where they indicated that as long as any funding not spent by 31st March 2025 is fully committed, the grant can be carried forward to the next financial year to support these costs.
- 7.4 The DfE are currently unable to confirm if any further funding will be available to support this program going forward. Therefore, if the LA chose to continue to provide this service in 2025/26, internal investment may be required. The level of service provision and therefore ongoing costs would need to be reviewed prior to any final agreements. The local authority would also explore with partners potential contributions to enable the Families First Programme as a partnership model to be a sustainable framework for service deliver.
- 7.5 If ongoing funding is confirmed, this will be of significant benefit to the Local Authority creating the foundations for sustainable transformation. It will also enable the continuation of the additional resources and activity detailed in the costed plan to continue, and would allow for the continued commissioning of advocacy services and the provision of the Family Network Support Package.
- 7.6 If ongoing funding is not confirmed, internal investment will be needed if the decision is made to continue with the Programme. It is requested that this investment is noted in the Budget setting for 2025/26. The preferred investment required will be equivalent to the £2.23m grant awarded. This will support ongoing conversations with the Department for Education evidencing Walsall's commitment to the programme and the level of resource required. However, before final commitment to investment is made, there would need to be a review of the impact of the Families First Programme to assess the impact of the

different strands of the Families First Pathfinder activity and decide which elements would need to continue and which could be ceased. This will then inform the level of investment required ongoing and the relative financial benefits that can be realised from the outcomes of the programme.

- 7.7 The 2024/25 funding allocation is sufficient to cover the proposed staffing costs for 7 months. However, to enable successful recruitment, the posts will need to be recruited to on a 12-month fixed term basis. Therefore, there is currently no confirmed funding for the remaining 5 months of these posts. If the grant continues in 2025/26, this can be used to support these costs. If the grant does not continue, there is a financial risk to the LA of £818k maximum to fund the remainder of the posts.
- 7.8 This risk may reduce if not all posts are recruited to within the expected time frame and will be fully reviewed alongside the decision-making process around the future of the project when further information around future funding is known.
- 7.9 To note, the project team costs are fully funded for 12 months from the start of the programme.
- 7.10 It should also be noted that in addition to the grant funding provided, existing resources across the LA are also being utilised to support the initial set up and implementation of this programme to ensure it is efficient and effective. This is a further cost to the LA of circa £500k of existing resource, including finance support, project team support, admin support and HR, DATs and transformation other support. Some of these costs are only expected to be one off and will not be needed in future years, and some costs are related to the conversion of social work and other operational posts
- 7.11 The Families First Pathfinder Programme is expected to support the Local Authority to achieve cost and service benefits in a number of ways including:
- the reduction of children and families requiring more intensive, costlier professional intervention;
 - reductions in the number of children entering care;
 - an increase in children who are able to live with wider family and network Connected Carer Foster Carers compared to other foster care placements;
 - lessened use of crisis commissioned services;
 - less use of commissioned experts and interventions that will be delivered in-house;
 - increased workforce stability.
- 7.12 Initial, high-level modelling of the savings and benefits of the Families First programme has been undertaken. From this, it has been projected that the programme will enable the service to realise (£5.17m) of new savings over the next 4 financial years in addition to (£0.73m) of additional savings relating to existing STPs as detailed in the table below.

7.13 However, the impact of the programme has also been reviewed in line with existing savings already included within the MTFO. There is a current saving relating to extension of the family safeguarding model into corporate parenting which focuses predominantly on reunification of children in care with families. Given the Families First Pathfinder is aimed at reducing the number of children entering care, this reduces the ability to achieve the existing saving. This has been included within the table below and reduced the total additional savings achievable to £3.47m over the next 4 financial years.

Saving	2025/26 £	2026/27 £	2027/28 £	2028/29 £	Total £
Extend family safeguarding into corporate parenting (existing STP)	920,656	755,218	755,218		2,431,092
Adolescent service – Early Help Avoidance (existing STP)	(200,854)	(177,679)	(177,679)	(177,679)	(733,891)
NEW – Pathfinder connected carers	(184,835)	(295,476)	(295,476)	(295,476)	(1,071,263)
NEW – Pathfinder Avoidance of Care IFAs	(297,525)	(550,523)	(550,523)	(550,523)	(1,949,094)
NEW – Pathfinder Lower cost placements	(247,467)	(634,220)	(634,220)	(634,220)	(2,150,127)
Total	(10,025)	(902,680)	(902,680)	(1,657,898)	(3,473,283)

7.14 The modelling used in the savings calculations is based on the following:

- Existing STP Adolescent Service - A key part of the Families First Programme is specialist Adolescent Practitioners and preventative Youth and Community Workers. This will help to support the specialist work needed with our most vulnerable adolescent children and their families. It has been projected that if 6 adolescent children avoided care, this would be a total annual saving of (£1.93m). Some of this is already included within the current MTFO although it is understood the Pathfinder work will support achievement of the current savings target and has enabled the target to be increased by (£0.73m) over the next 4 years.
- NEW Pathfinder Connected Carers – This is based on an increase of 10 children being able to be placed with family Connected Carer Foster Carers rather than external fostering placements. Total projected saving of (£1.07m).
- NEW Pathfinder Avoidance of Care – This is based on a reduction of 12 children entering care in external fostering placements due to pathfinder interventions that have enabled them to remain with their parents or with a member of their family. Total projected saving of (£1.95m).
- NEW Pathfinder Lower Cost Placements – This is based on the Pathfinder model reducing the number of children in existing foster placements therefore making more foster carers available for new children entering care. The saving includes 2 children entering an external foster placement rather than an external residential placement with a total projected saving of (£2.15m).

- 7.15 A full cost benefit analysis model for the Families First Programme is being developed, and this will be taken forwards by the Data, Performance and Outcomes Lead once appointed to the programme. It is anticipated that this model will identify further savings from 2026/27 onwards in addition to those detailed above. This is based on embedding preventative family help across Children's Social Care and Early Help services, meaning that there are fewer families that require higher-cost crisis interventions and court Care Proceedings. However, until the Programme is further embedded and outcomes framework is in place, it is difficult to quantify what this may look like. This project will require the comparative analysis and mapping of outcomes for families during the pathfinder period, compared to analysis of outcomes during previous years.

8. *Legal implications*

- 8.1 Statutory guidance has been amended through Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 to enable the programme reforms. Legal Services are being consulted about proposed changes, and any potential legal implications. The area where this may be most relevant is in creating guidance around the provision to families of packages of financial support known as 'Family Network Support Packages', to ensure consistency and accountability, and alignment with statutory provisions under the Children Act 1989.

9. *Procurement Implications/Social Value*

- 9.1 A key feature of the Families First Programme will be to review support for children and families at a local level, and across Walsall's communities. The aim will be to scope what is available and to identify and meet gaps. This will have potential implications for procurement and commissioning of services and adding social value to local areas.

10. *Property implications*

- 10.1 There are no new property implications as a result of this proposal. There is ongoing work to identify and continue to develop the Locality Hub buildings.

11. *Health and wellbeing implications*

- 11.1 Staff wellbeing is a key part of the service Workforce and Wellbeing Strategy. This is being updated for 2024-25 and will include consideration of the Pathfinder.

12. *Reducing Inequalities*

- 12.1 The impact of the families First Programme will be beneficial to reducing inequalities. It will enable Children's Services to redesign core systems in line with feedback from Walsall's children and families, and from our staff. This will support accessibility for the service and the offer to children and families in respect of both Family Help and Child Protection. One key strand of the

programme is to review and develop our Family Help offer for parents of disabled children, and children with additional learning needs and special educational needs.

13. Staffing implications

- 13.1 The Families First Programme will mean there are changes in Children's Services, especially Children's Social Care and Early Help. As set out above, staff consultation and engagement will be essential to effectively deliver the programme, as staff need to feel a part of and buy into the changes and new ways of working for these to be implemented effectively and make a difference.
- 13.2 Staffing changes for the initial duration of the programme will involve recruitment into the service to be able to deliver key reforms and aspects of the Design Specification, such as creating roles to deliver Family Help Services, and Family Network Meetings and Family Group Conferences.
- 13.3 There may be changes identified through the Pathfinder to roles and service structures. These will be understood through internal quality assurance and performance analysis, and through the programme evaluation methods. Any proposed changes will be implemented through the appropriate council Business Design and HR processes. JNCC will receive regular updates as to the progress.

14. Climate Impact

- 14.1 There is no climate impact as a result of this update/proposal.

15. Consultation

- 15.1 A Big Conversation Consultation exercise is underway with families. This begins consultation activity that runs throughout the duration of the Families First Programme and is a part of the Design Specification that needs to be delivered upon. A Participation Lead is being recruited to lead this activity.
- 15.2 Engagement with key partners and stakeholders, with our workforce and with families will be fundamental to the effective implementation of the Families First Programme. There is a counterbalancing need to move at pace and have an overview of planned reforms with clear timescales for implementation, and to properly consult and engage with people about these proposals, and for them to be based on the best available evidence of needs and performance indicators about current practices and the impact for children and families. There are two key strands to engagement activity. First is the Big Consultation programme across Children's Services and the Walsall Safeguarding Children's Partnership. The second is a series of more in-depth Working Groups to lead on the development of specific reform areas.

16. Decide

16.1 Cabinet are not required to make any formal decisions at this stage – Cabinet are being asked to endorse and support the Families First Programme in Children’s Services, and note the initial overview and activity set out in this report.

17. Respond

17.1 The date for the programme to begin is the 1st July 2024. This is the start of the Test and Learn phase to understand and implement reforms. The proposed launch for the key strands of the reforms will be September and October 2024. The Pathfinder period will then run until 31st March 2025.

17.2 It is requested that Cabinet endorse the proposals for the Families First Pathfinder Programme and note the investment provided, the need to review continued investment as the programme progresses and there is further clarity from the Department for Education, and the financial implications and projected savings from the programme.

18. Review

18.1 The Pathfinder Programme will report progress into Proud Board and the Walsall Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive Leadership Team. The Pathfinder programme will operate with a Programme Board that will meet monthly. The Programme will also require regular reporting to the Department for Education. All project groups and boards will have an appropriate Terms of Reference to reflect their purpose.

18.2 The governance proposal builds on existing arrangements and is developed from the previous Family Safeguarding Board arrangements. Working groups have been established based on the four key reform strands which will report into the board. The working groups will have appropriate partner representation and will also be charged with ensuring there is meaningful consultation with children, parents, and communities about the proposals as they develop.

Appendices

Appendix One – Costed Plan

Background papers

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Signed



Colleen Male
Executive Director Childrens Services
03.07.2024

Signed



Councillor Ellson
Portfolio holder

03.07.2024