

FAMILY FIRST PARTNERSHIP (FFP) REFORMS

Committee name	Children, Families & Education Select Committee
Officer reporting	Helen Smith, Head of Service, Social Care Delivery Transformation Donna Hugh, Assistant Director, Care Provision
Papers with report	Care Strategy
Ward	All

HEADLINES

Hillingdon Children’s Services is undertaking a major transformation in response to the Family First Partnership (FFP) reforms and the statutory duties introduced by the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024. These changes mark a significant shift in how support is delivered to children and families, creating services that are integrated, responsive, and shaped by co-production and trauma-informed practice. This report sets out the progress achieved to date, the governance arrangements in place, and the actions being taken to meet national priorities.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee note the key developments and findings outlined in this report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

London Borough of Hillingdon Children’s Services is undergoing a significant transformation across statutory social care services in response to the Family First Partnership (FFP) reforms introduced by the Department for Education (DfE). This work is aligned with the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill and national priorities for integrated Family Help, multi-agency child protection, and Family Group Decision Making (FGDM).

Our approach is collaborative, working closely with strategic partners in Health, Education, Police, and Voluntary Sectors. The service is drawing on best practice from the Families First for Children Pathfinder programme and the guidance published by the DfE “How-To Guide” to ensure effective implementation.

Governance

Since the announcement of the FFP reforms in March 2025, Hillingdon has acted decisively to embed the required changes. At the heart of this transformation is the Executive Transformation Group, which brings together senior leaders from health, education, police, and social care. Meeting monthly, this group provides oversight, monitors progress, and ensures accountability across all strands of the programme.

A detailed Delivery Plan for 2025–26 has been submitted to the Department for Education, setting out the phased implementation approach, anticipated expenditure, and workforce development strategy. Officers have maintained regular engagement with DfE colleagues, including a recent session in December 2025, and continue to draw on sector-wide expertise through the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LiiA) and the nine Pathfinder authorities. Financial

oversight remains robust, with budget proposals and grant allocations tracked through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy to ensure compliance and sustainability.

Consultation and Engagement

Between April – June 2025, extensive consultation took place with staff and partners, this included roadshows, workshops, and reflective sessions to engage frontline practitioners, health colleagues, police, and education leaders in shaping the reforms. Officers have worked closely with unions and staff groups to ensure transparency, support, and shared ownership of the changes. Our approach has been informed by national best practice, including co-design principles and family voice integration, as recommended in the DfE's *How-To Guide*.

During this process, several delivery groups have been formed, each responsible for specific areas of the transformation. These groups include representatives from multiple agencies as well as adults and children who have lived experience. DfE grant funding has been used to increase capacity for engagement and participation with children, families and parents through the recruitment of two additional part time Participation Officers with lived experience to lead on the co-production. In addition, officers have created a data analyst apprenticeship role. This role will strengthen capacity to meet the increase data requirements of the FFP. Recruitment for this role will be ring fenced to individuals with care experience, reflecting the commitment to developing talent and supporting our responsibilities as a corporate parent.

Family Help

A major milestone was reached on 27 August 2025 with the launch of our new locality-based Family Help Service. The service integrated Early Help key workers with First Response and Children's Social Work Teams, creating a single locality-based Family Help service. The localities are aligned our Family Hubs/ children centres enabling services to be provided in a geographical area, responsive to community needs.

In line with FFP requirements officers have increased our workforce of alternatively qualified key workers, enabling families to benefit from skilled early help support staff. Recruitment has brought diverse expertise from health, education, therapeutic services, and criminal justice into the service, to complement our social work teams. Additional service managers provide leadership, quality assurance, and progression opportunities across the new service. A skills audit informs a structured training plan, complementing safeguarding and social care development programs. Trauma-informed practice remains central to the support provided to children and families in the borough.

A new parent consultation group is being developed to support co-production of a revised assessment framework and other parent-directed communications, authored by parents themselves. The upcoming single Family Help assessment and plan will replace Early Help and Social Care assessments and processes.

Our ambition is to create a service where children and families know, trust, and feel supported by their key worker or social worker. Families will experience continuity of care, with practitioners who understand their history and context, reducing the need for repeated storytelling and building strong, respectful relationships. There is an associated training programme developed to meet the needs of the service leaning on the established training available from the West London Alliance and Safeguarding Partnership.

New Beginnings

Alongside Family Help, the New Beginnings service launched in November 2025, offering trauma-informed support to expectant mothers to reduce repeat care proceedings. At the time of writing it is supporting eight families, only seven days after its launch and its group work delivery programme commenced in December 2025.

The team is working closely with the Topaz, specialist midwifery team and health visitors to ensure clear and consistent communication. These links are invaluable, allowing the team to share information quickly and effectively and vice versa. The existing trusted relationships with social workers is a real strength, helping to deliver a high level of support to families.

Multi-Agency Child Protection Team and the Stronger Families Hub.

Officers are currently transitioning into the development of the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) and a revised and invigorated Stronger Families Hub, moving away from the traditional MASH and bringing an innovative non-stigmatising and creative one stop hub, with further integration of services across the safeguarding partnership. The service has been co-located at the Civic Centre since 01 December with representation from Probation, Housing, Health, Education, Police, Youth Offer and Domestic Abuse Services. This builds on the previous MASH relationships. There is ongoing work to develop Standard Operating Procedures and develop a strong culture of multi-agency decision making.

As part of this development officers have recruited eight Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP) roles, this is an important part of the reforms and one of the most significant changes since the Children's Act 2004. The LCPP is the expert practitioner for child protection and will work with police, health and education partners to identify and respond to children at risk or experiencing significant harm. The role is central to the MACPT. All Child Protection enquiries will be co-allocated to a Family Help Social Worker to undertake the assessment with the LCPP chairing the conference and ensuring expert oversight of child protection processes. The LCPP posts provide progression opportunities for senior social workers across the service who evidence the skill and knowledge to step up into this role. The transition to full implementation will continue through to March 2026, supported by interim resilience measures.

Partner agencies will continue to refer into Children's Services via the established Stronger Families Portal and will be reviewed by the Stronger Families Hub and actioned accordingly, including advice, signposting, or onward referrals.

Family Group Decision Making

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) continues to be a cornerstone of our approach to empowering families and promoting collaborative solutions. FGDM is a voluntary, structured process that brings together a child's wider family network to develop a family-led plan addressing concerns about safety and wellbeing. This approach prioritises the voice of the family, enabling them to identify practical support and resources while working alongside skilled professionals to safeguard the child.

In Hillingdon, FGDM is delivered through the well-established Family Group Conference (FGC) model, which has been embedded across our services for several years. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024 now makes FGDM mandatory at the pre-proceedings stage, reinforcing its importance in reducing the need for care proceedings and supporting early intervention.

To strengthen this offer, officers are working on:

- **Expanding access and capacity:** Ensuring FGDM is available at key decision points, including early help, child protection planning, and pre-proceedings.
- **Embedding FGDM within Family Help Plans:** Aligning the process with our new integrated Family Help model so that family-led solutions are central to intervention planning.
- **Training and workforce development:** Delivering targeted training for social workers and key practitioners to improve confidence in facilitating FGDM and integrating outcomes into statutory plans.
- **Enhancing co-production:** Working with families and participation officers with lived experience to refine the model and ensure it reflects the needs and preferences of those using the service.
- **Monitoring impact:** Developing robust data collection and evaluation mechanisms to measure outcomes, including reductions in care proceedings and improvements in family resilience.

Our ambition is to make FGDM a routine part of practice, not just a statutory requirement, so that families feel empowered, respected, and supported in shaping decisions about their children's lives.

Strengthen the Role of Education in Safeguarding

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024 places new duties on safeguarding partners to ensure Education and childcare settings are fully involved in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Recognising the vital role schools play in early identification and intervention, Hillingdon has strengthened representation from education leaders within the Safeguarding Partnership.

School leaders now contribute at both strategic and operational levels, helping shape policy and practice. This includes participation in partnership boards and safeguarding forums, ensuring that education perspectives are embedded in decision-making. Improved communication channels and regular briefings support consistent engagement, while collaborative working enables schools to play an active role in safeguarding planning and response.

Other Requirements of the Schools and Wellbeing bill

The schools and wellbeing bill includes a number of other mandated requirements in addition to those above. This includes the offer of Staying close support, publication of a Local offer for care leavers and commitment that care leavers will not to be regarded as becoming homeless intentionally.

In November 2025 Hillingdon Children's Services published its Care Strategy which outlines our commitment to delivering high quality care, support, and opportunities for individuals with lived experience of care. This strategy outlined our staying close offer, housing support and local offer for care leavers and is attached as an appendix below

Kinship Local Offer

The National Kinship Care Strategy places kinship care at the centre of children's services reform. Under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (Dec 2024), all local authorities must publish a

Kinship Local Offer detailing support for kinship carers and children, based on need rather than legal status. This offer should cover financial assistance, housing advice, education and childcare guidance, clear information and signposting, and access to legal support.

Hillingdon is developing a comprehensive Kinship Local Offer to strengthen support for Special Guardians and wider kinship families. A multi-agency Kinship Steering Group, including Housing, DWP, Health, Education, Legal Services and Children's Services, is overseeing development and implementation. Engagement with regional and national forums is informing best practice, and the full offer is scheduled for publication by March 2026. Hillingdon has applied to join the Department for Education Kinship Pilot to enhance early identification and support pathways. A review of the financial policy is also underway to align allowances with fostering rates.

Currently, Hillingdon provides family support, advocacy, regular support groups, annual welfare checks for over 200 carers, newsletters, therapeutic post-order support from a Senior Social Worker, and CFAB international kinship assessments. Co-production remains central, with input from kinship families, partner agencies, voluntary organisations, and universal services.

Key priorities:

- Publish the Kinship Local Offer by March 2026.
- Strengthen financial support and align with fostering allowances.

PERFORMANCE DATA

Officers are collaborating with colleagues in Digital and Intelligence to enhance performance data capabilities and strengthen management oversight. This includes the development of Power BI dashboards that deliver real-time, consolidated insights for managers, replacing previously fragmented reporting processes. Additionally, officers are engaging with other local authorities to incorporate best practices and ensure the dashboards are intuitive, user-friendly, and accessible.

The programme will include new reporting requirements. Programme reporting will comprise quarterly quantitative and qualitative data returns, alongside initial local planning information. Monitoring will be time-bound for the transformation period (expected to run until the end of 2027–28) and will supplement existing national datasets and cross-government performance insights across local authority, health, and police services.

In addition, delivery of the programme will require updates to the case management system, resulting in the development of new reports and amendments to existing reports to ensure continued statutory compliance and alignment with programme monitoring requirements. These requirements are expected to have implications for existing statutory returns, specifically the Children in Need (CIN) census.

RESIDENT BENEFIT

This report allows Elected Members to have an overview of the Council's approach to the implementation of the Family First reforms and Schools and wellbeing bill.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: policy summary notes](#)
[Families First Partnership programme - GOV.UK](#)

APPENDICES

Care Strategy