

Proposed Decision to be made Under the Council's Urgency Procedure by the Leader of the Council on 27th October 2023

Application to Department of Education Families First for children pathfinder programme and Designated Family Judge Trailblazer

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| Portfolio Holder | Leader of the Council |
| Date of decision | 27 October 2023 |
| | Signed |

1. Recommendation

That the Leader of the Council

1. Authorises the Executive Director for People to submit an application to the Department of Education (DfE) (jointly with partner agencies) for funding of up to £5m from the Families First for Children programme.
2. Authorises the Executive Director for People to submit an application to the Department of Education (DfE) (jointly with partner agencies) for funding from the Designated Family Judge Trailblazer programme.
3. Authorises the Executive Director for People to enter into any agreements necessary to secure the grant funding from DfE on terms and conditions acceptable to the Executive Director for Resources, and in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Families to implement the proposals contained within this report to be funded by the grants received.

2. Reasons for decision

2.1 Pursuant to the Constitution, approvals for the submission of bids for funding in excess of £250,000 sit with Portfolio Holders. Due to the urgent nature of this report and the values involved the report is brought to the Leader.

2.2 The funding sought will enable the Council in collaboration with partners from the Safeguarding Board to drive improvements to family help and children's social care to ensure children and their families are supported and protected, and to work with central government to ensure we are ready to deliver on key strategy commitments to be implemented following recent national reviews and upcoming statutory guidance.

3. Reasons for Urgency

3.1 On 6th October 2023, the Department of Education opened to applications from Local Authorities to apply for grant funding for two separate pilots, with a short window for applications to be completed. This report seeks approval to submit applications to these programmes to deliver new ways of working to improve support to children and families.

3.2 Pursuant to Standing Order 18, a decision may be made under the urgency procedure where the decision is urgent, and it is impracticable to comply with standing orders 16 and/or 17 and the consent of the chair of a relevant overview and scrutiny committee has been obtained in writing that:

3.2.1 the decision cannot reasonably be deferred; and

3.2.2 the decision should be treated as a matter of urgency; and

3.2.3 where the proposed decision is contrary to or not wholly in accordance with the policy framework or budget it is not practicable to convene a quorate meeting of the full council.

3.3 A decision will be urgent if any delay likely to be caused by call-in would seriously prejudice the council or the public interest. The deadline for bids to both programmes is short and there is insufficient time to meet the usual publication and call-in requirements and still submit a bid given the complexity involved. Failing to submit a bid would prejudice the Council's ability to secure funding and delay the potential for delivering the proposals within this report to the detriment of the public.

3.4 As the timeframe for submission of bids to the two programmes taken together is short (requiring the same resources to prepare the bid) and they are linked in terms of delivery of child safeguarding improvements, they are brought for a single decision to enable the finalisation of bids in advance of 6 November 2023 for application to Families First for Children programme and 17 November 2023 for the Family Judge Trailblazer programme. Both applications require approval from partner agencies and therefore significant governance processes for each agency involved to go through to ensure we have individual agencies and partnership agreements in place before the applications can be made.

4. Background information

The Families First for Children Programme

4.1 The Families First for Children Programme was initially announced in February 2023 as part of the government's children's social care implementation strategy, "Stable homes, built on love". This strategy responds to recommendations from the

independent review of children's social care, 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.

4.2 The pathfinder will test delivery of key strategy commitments, which the government has committed that all local authorities in the future will need to implement. It is anticipated that some of the changes will be included in the updated "Working Together to Safeguard Children" statutory guidance which is expected to be published by the end of 2023. Therefore, this programme provides an opportunity for Warwickshire to secure funding to enable the Council to work with central government to transform family help and children's social care and to ensure children and their families are supported and protected.

4.3 The Families First for Children programme has four main strands, aimed at securing overarching and significant changes to early help, children in need and child protection services. It is also intended to provide additional support to help children to remain with their parents or wider family network where safe to do so. The four strands of change that selected areas will be expected to design and test are:

4.3.1 Overarching ***system-level reform including multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA).***

Working with local statutory safeguarding partners to embed the principles of the Pathfinder in order to lead and deliver these reforms. This will include considering changes to how multi-agency partners and the Council operate, with clear roles and responsibilities at both strategic and operational levels; and an increased - role for education. It is understood that the role of education may become a statutory one as the approach develops.

4.3.2 ***Family help.***

To establish locally based, multi-disciplinary family help services that work collaboratively with partners to provide welcoming, seamless and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families. This will bring together targeted early help and child in need support provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

4.3.3 ***Child protection.***

Delivering new dedicated and skilled multi-agency child protection teams comprising practitioners from a range of disciplines, including social workers with greater child protection expertise and experience; working together to improve families' engagement with and experiences of child protection processes – including via parental representation.

4.3.4 ***Family networks.***

To make greater use of family networks, with earlier use of family group decision-making throughout the reformed system. This includes providing targeted funding in Family Network Support Packages (FNSPs) to enable more children to live safely at home or to support a transition into kinship care.

4.4 A key part of implementing the programme will be co-production to design services with parents, carers, children and young people. Our strong Voice, Influence and Change Team are in positive position to deliver this and will work together with staff, managers and practitioners within the Council and other agencies to implement these changes.

4.5 The Council has received strong partnership support for this funding application from the Safeguarding Executive Board, which includes Warwickshire Police, the ICB and the County Council. The application will be a partnership application, led by the County Council, and it is anticipated that Warwickshire will be able to apply for the maximum grant of £5m. The funding and programme are for one year only and therefore significant pace and support will be required to implement the wide range of changes that are required within that timescale and funding envelope.

4.6 The work to be delivered by the programme seeks to encourage the provision of timely and early support for families, by working with professionals across the safeguarding partnership who know children best. Evidence so far suggests that the approach can reduce handovers between teams when needs increase or decrease by using the Family Help Lead Practitioner (FHLP) role (who has a long-standing relationship with the family) to bring in other professional and agencies to assist and provide support. Under this approach and where children need protecting from harm, multi-agency teams investigate abuse together and the Lead Child Protection Practitioner will assist the Family Help Lead Practitioner.

4.3 Furthermore, the changes are intended to improve practical support for parents and, where parents cannot provide safe care, to increase support and assistance for extended family to care for children so that they do not need to come into the care of the local authority. With Warwickshire's existing investment in early help, family-based decision making, and support to keep children where it is safe with extended family sitting alongside our strong partnerships with our police and ICB places Warwickshire is in a strong position to implement these changes which will improve services for children.

Designated Family Judge Trailblazer

4.7 The Designated Family Judge Trailblazer aims to reduce timescales and delay within the Family Justice system for public law cases (e.g., care proceedings initiated by Local Authorities). The application has the support of our local Judiciary and Warwickshire Legal Services. The application requires the agreement of other local authorities within the District Family Justice area and will therefore be a joint bid with Coventry City Council.

4.8 Under the Trailblazer, the Department of Education plans to pilot a new way of working with five District Family Justice areas. There is a total of £2.5m available across the five District Family Justice areas. If successful the Department of Education will appoint an external provider to complete a deep dive analysis of our local Family Justice System, from which a co-designed solution to improve timescales will be established. A whole system approach is required from Children's Services, the legal profession involved in the public law process and the Judiciary to identify and address barriers and issues that create delay for children in the Family Court system.

4.9 There are some risks with this programme, as the details of exactly what solutions and changes will be recommended for implementation will not be clear until the deep dive analysis has been completed. However, the risk is considered manageable and proportionate given the potential benefits in terms of cost, resource and an improved experience for those in the system. It is hoped that the evaluation by an externally appointed independent delivery partner will provide a deep insight into the Family Justice System and how things might be improved. Solutions will be focused on aligning system governance, improving pre-proceedings data and practice, creating vehicles and incentives for multiagency collaboration and helping children and families to navigate the system. The programme will also be independently evaluated and so will contribute to learning in the wider Family Justice System and Children's Services.

Timescales associated with the decision and next steps.

4.11 The deadline for submission of applications to the Families First for Children Programme is 6th November 2023. A decision whether the application has been successful is expected in January 2024. If the bid is successful, the programme is intended to start in April 2024.

4.12 Given the short timescales and as the Council will be required in the future to apply the principles required by the "Stable Homes, Built on Love" strategy, whether or not the grant application is successful, work will commence with partner agencies between now and April 2024 to consider how best to implement the new ways of working in Warwickshire.

4.13 The deadline for submission of bids to the Designated Family Judge Trailblazer is 17th November 2023. A decision whether this application is successful is expected in December 2023, with a start date for delivery in early 2024.

5. Financial implications

5.1 Revenue Implications of these grants are that the County Council would share one off grant to implement changes in practice. Warwickshire will be able to receive £5m, the maximum available grant for the Families First for Children Programme. A fully costed plan with partner agencies to implement the changes will be included in the application. The funding will need to be spent by 31st March 2025.

5.2 The grant will predominantly be used to enable bringing together of services in to locality multi agency teams. Our strategy has been to avoid permanent increases to our workforce establishment to ensure sustainability of the new ways of working. Spending plan for the grant includes programme and change management, increased leadership capacity, increased quality and assurance support, development of ICT to enable Mosaic case record system to be used by other agencies business intelligence to enable partnership integrated data maturity, along with HR and Finance support to enable change. At least 20% of the funding needs to be used for support to families and extended family members to keep children within the family network. The proposed costed plan will be authorised and agreed by Finance Services.

5.3 The Designated Family Judge Trailblazer grant is anticipated to be in the region of £500,000, which would be a shared one-off grant to implement changes in practice with partner agencies. The DfE advise that the funding will be used to enable an independent evaluation current performance, culture and processes to be undertaken. The funding will then be used to implement an agreed action plan as recommended by the findings of the evaluation.

6. Environmental implications

No environmental implications have been identified.

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| Executive Director For People | Nigel Minns nigelminns@warwickshire.gov.uk |
| Portfolio Holder | Councillor Isobel Seccombe Leader of the Council |

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| Urgent matter? | Yes |
| Confidential or exempt? | No |
| Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework? | No |

List of background papers (If applicable)

Details about the Families First for Children Programme are available here: [Families first for children \(FFC\) pathfinder programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/families-first-for-children-pathfinder-programme).

Appendix A - The Design Specification details the specific minimum changes that local authorities will be expected to implement: [FFC pathfinder: Design specification \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456)

Appendix B – Details about the Designated Family Judge Trailblazer are here: [Designated Family Judge Trailblazer pilot 2024-2025: application guide for local authorities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456)

Members and officers consulted and informed

Portfolio Holder – Councillor I. Seccombe – Leader of the Council

Corporate Board – Monica Fogarty - CEO, Nigel Minns – Executive Director People, Rob Powell, Executive Director Resources, Mark Ryder- Executive Director Communities.

Legal – Nichola Vine

Finance – Andy Felton – Director and Brian Smith- Children’s Services Senior Accountant.

Equality – Delroy Madden - Diversity, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team Leader

Democratic Services – Helen Barnsley

Councillors – Councillor Sue Markham (Portfolio Holder for Children & Families) and Members of the Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Adrian Warwick (Chair of Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee) and Councillor Marian Humphreys (Chair of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee) - (For consent to Urgency)

Local Member(s): N/A