

Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme

Journey to date – November 2023

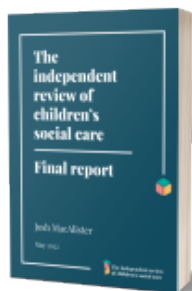
Purpose

The **Families First for Children Pathfinder (FFCP) Programme** launched in July 2023 as part of the implementation of the Government's 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' strategy. The Department for Education (DfE) and the Delivery Partner (DP) have since been working with three Pathfinder areas to co-design local models that deliver reforms across multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA), family help, child protection and family networks, as well as the first four (of seven) Pilot sites to collect evidence around the effectiveness of new Family Network Support Packages (FNSPs).

This pack aims to provide the wider Children's Social Care (CSC) sector with an overview of the FFCP Programme, outlining both the overall programme structure and the progress to date across three key workstreams:

- **Pathfinders**;
- **Pilots**; and
- **Learning**.

Context



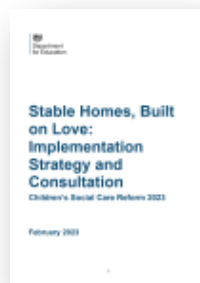
In response to these recommendations, the Department for Education (DfE) published its implementation strategy, '**Stable Homes, Built on Love**', setting out a range of proposed reforms in CSC.



○ May 2022

○ The **Independent Care Review** and **National Panel review** made a number of ambitious recommendations to transform support and protection in children's social care (CSC).

○ Feb 2023

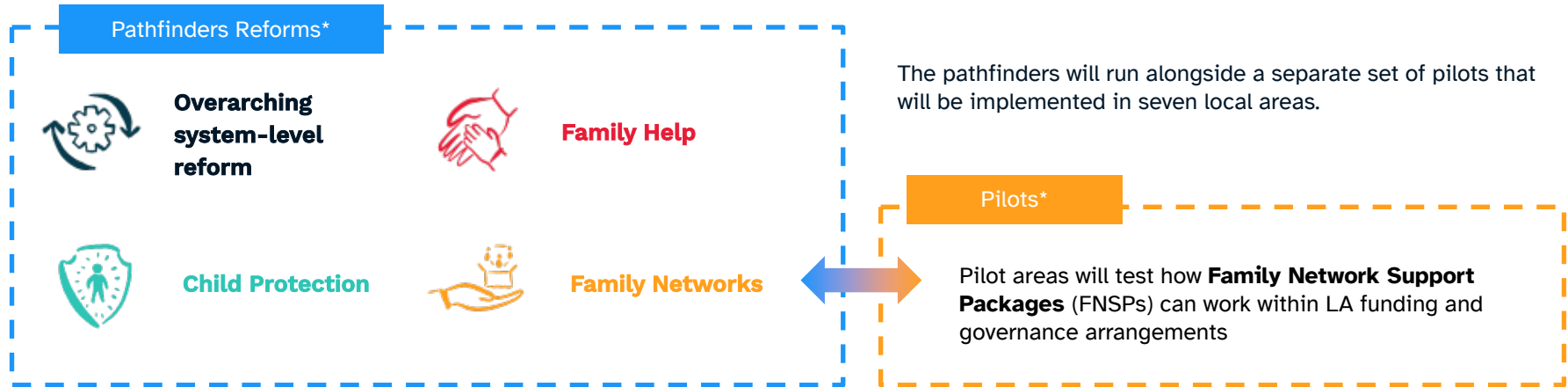


○ Jul 2023

○ The DfE established the **Families First for Children Pathfinder (FFCP) programme** to facilitate system reform across MASA, family help, child protection and family network services.

FFCP Programme Overview

The pathfinder will enable national government to understand the impact that reforms across MASA, family help, child protection and family networks have on the different sectors and partners involved, at a smaller scale, before making decisions on further roll out.



**A pathfinder differs from a pilot: A pathfinder is not seeking to prove that reform works, but to test how reform should be delivered most effectively on the frontline. This programme includes both a pathfinder across all reforms and a pilot focussing specifically on FNSPs.*

FFC Pathfinder reforms



Overarching system-level reform (including MASA)

- Embed system-wide, 'families first' culture and language
- Engage families and children and young people in design and implementation
- Streamline and support effective information-sharing and systems
- Clarify and strengthen MASAs, ways of working and independent scrutiny
- Strengthen role of education as strategic safeguarding partner
- Clarify and confirm key outcomes



Child Protection

- Establish the Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP) role, underpinned by clear skills, responsibilities, processes for co-working with family help, supervision and case oversight
- Operationalise a multi-agency child protection team (MACPT), secure dedicated resource across agencies and clarify its' core functions
- Improving parents' experiences and engagement with child protection, including through independent parental representation



Family Help

- Establish multi-disciplinary Family Help Services to provide seamless support for families across targeted early help and Child in Need (section 17)
- Integrate family help within existing systems and services
- Deliver an integrated family help 'front door' that is welcoming, effectively identifies risk and decides on the appropriate lead practitioner for a family
- Establish the Family Help Lead Practitioner (FHLP) role
- Establish clear thresholds and a single family help assessment and plan for families
- Establish proportionate plans for case management, oversight and supervision



Family Networks

- Establish family networks as a 'golden thread' throughout the reformed system
- Align family group decision making (FGDM) and family group conferencing (FGC) with family help and child protection processes
- Test provision of practical and financial support via Family Network Support Packages (FNSP)

Key issues



Overarching system-level reform

- How to secure buy-in and build financially sustainable and equitable arrangements across partner agencies and national government, within current contexts and different frameworks/priorities
- Role of education: lack of statutory requirement
- Definition of 'family': how to reflect diverse communities with a range of needs
- Multi-agency information-sharing: logistics and national direction
- How to effectively develop or retain independent scrutiny/accountability functions
- Clarifying and understanding outcomes



Child Protection

- MACPTs: how to reconcile different partner frameworks, priorities and constraints; defining shared vision and purpose; challenges around securing dedicated resource from partners; issues around co-location; how to avoid de-skilling and abdication of responsibility across wider system; how to avoid escalation of risk earlier in system
- LCCP role: defining the level/length of experience required; how to recruit to the role given concerns about burnout and retention; concerns about potential loss of independence in child protection conferences should LCPPs chair them; resource pressures around co-working between FHLP and LCPP; how to create a viable career pathway through the system
- Parental representation: how and when to offer to all families



Family Help

- Moving across thresholds
- Case holding arrangements, including oversight and supervision (especially where FHLP is not a social worker and/or not employed by or based in the LA)
- FHLP role: training and development requirements, when FHLP should be a qualified social worker, parity across agencies/roles
- Transparency for families – ensuring they are aware of, can consent (or not) to and understand transitions
- Multi-disciplinary service: handling and maximising opportunities for tenders being re-commissioned during test and learn phase



Family Networks

- Concerns that FNSPs could unintentionally create unsustainable, long-term dependency and a perceived 'hierarchy of care' with existing, enhanced packages of support available for family and friend foster carers
- What happens if or when families are refused FNSPs

Pilots



Family Network Support Packages (FNSP)

- FNSPs will **deliver funding directly to family networks for practical support**, in cases where there is a barrier to keeping children within the family network that can be addressed through financial support
- The primary objective of the pilot is that FNSPs will create **sustainable solutions to keep children living with their birth parents**, where appropriate and in their best interests.
- When this is not the case, the use of an FNSP at pre-proceedings is aimed at smoothing a later **transition into kinship care**.

Aims of the pilot programme

- Understand whether an FNSP **reduces the likelihood of children** at pre-proceedings stage **entering the care system** and understand barriers and facilitators to delivery.
- **Gather additional data** on the impact of an FNSP intervention at pre-proceedings, incl. information on the cost-effectiveness of the package and qualitative data on family experiences.
- **Inform the scope of future national FNSP policy** by evaluating how FNSP funding can be most effective at pre-proceedings.
- **Identify delivery challenges** for the potential further roll-out of FNSPs.

Progress to date

- Wave 1 of the Pilot has gone live in four local authorities in September 2023: Brighton, Gateshead, Sunderland, as well as Telford and Wrekin.
- So far, FNSP funding has only been accessed in two of the four authorities.
- Key barriers raised by wave 1 LAs are around the cohort restriction on children in pre-proceedings and the cultural shift to practice.