

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

14 July 2026

Families First – Children's Social Care Reforms

Report by Director of Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - a) **Approve the use of the Families First grant in Oxfordshire to support the delivery of Children's Social Care reform, in line with the grant conditions set by the Department for Education; and**
 - b) **Delegate authority to the Director for Children's Services to undertake all necessary activity to utilise the grant funding in accordance with those conditions.**

Executive Summary

2. The Families First programme is a national reform programme focused on delivering earlier, more joined-up support to children and families. Oxfordshire has already begun implementation through pilot activity.
3. The programme is supported by ring-fenced grant funding of £6.4m (26-28), reducing to £5.5m for 28-29. Grant conditions of use are set by the Department for Education. This report seeks approval to utilise that funding to deliver the required reforms locally.

Background

4. The Families First programme is a national reform initiative which seeks to improve outcomes for children and families by providing earlier, more coordinated support, and by strengthening arrangements for child protection decision-making. Local authorities are required to implement these reforms by March 2027.
5. The programme is supported by a specific grant allocation, with conditions that set out how funding must be used. These conditions include requirements to establish a single, integrated system of family help, implementing family-led decision-making, and to strengthen multi-agency arrangements for managing risk and making child protection decisions.

Progress to Date

6. Oxfordshire has already taken forward a programme of test and learn activity to begin implementation of the required reforms. This has included piloting integrated approaches to family help, changes to child protection decision-making arrangements, and increased use of family-led planning.
7. This activity has been undertaken using existing capacity where possible and has provided practical learning to inform full implementation. It has enabled the local authority and partners to test new ways of working, refine operational arrangements, and build readiness for wider rollout.

Next Phase of Implementation

8. The next phase is to move from pilot delivery to full implementation of the Families First reforms across Children's Social Care. This will bring together early support and statutory intervention into a single, coherent offer for families, deliver family-led planning, and establish strengthened multi-agency arrangements for child protection.
9. Alongside this, work will continue with partners across health, police, education and the voluntary sector to ensure that services are aligned and that families experience a consistent and joined-up response.
10. Implementation will also need to take account of wider system changes, including Local Government Reorganisation. The proposed model has been designed so that it can scale to different organisational configurations, ensuring that statutory responsibilities can continue to be met safely and consistently under any future arrangements.

Financial Position and Use of Grant

11. The programme is supported by a multi-year grant from the Department for Education, with funding of approximately £6.4m per annum over the next two years, reducing to approximately £5.5m by 2028-29.
12. The Families First model will be delivered through a combination of existing core-funded Children's Social Care provision and targeted investment from this grant.
13. Delivery of core implementation activity is expected to require investment of approximately £5.5m per annum, subject to final scope, implementation phasing and confirmation of developing elements.
14. Based on the underlying proposal, this comprises approximately:
 - £1.8m for integrated support for children and families (Integrated Family Help)

- £0.9m for strengthened child protection arrangements (Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams)
- £0.4 million for family-led decision-making
- £1.5 million for specialist and targeted support (including the interface with Family Hubs)
- £0.5 million for kinship care and reunification support
- £0.4 million in existing grant-funded commitments.

15. In addition, the programme includes further time-limited transformation and implementation costs and developing elements which are not yet fully costed but will be met from within the overall grant allocation.

16. The use of this grant is subject to national conditions, including requirements that it is used to support delivery of the Families First model. As a result, the local authority has limited discretion in how the funding is applied.

Governance and Decision

17. Although the grant is ring-fenced and its use is directed through national conditions, the council is required to formally approve its use through the governance framework for Key Decisions.

18. This report therefore seeks approval to utilise the Families First grant in line with those conditions, and to delegate authority to the Director for Children's Services to implement the required activity. This will ensure that the council is able to proceed at pace with delivery, including meeting the conditions attached to the grant and associated national implementation timelines.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

19. The proposals support the council's ambitions to improve outcomes for children and young people by providing earlier support, reducing escalation of need, and strengthening safeguarding arrangements.

Financial Implications

20. The decision sought is to approve the use of the ring-fenced Families First grant, provided through the Children, Families and Youth Grant, and to delegate authority to the Director for Children's Services to deliver activity in accordance with the grant conditions.

21. The proposed use of funding is expected to be contained within the confirmed grant allocation and does not, through this decision, create an additional ongoing commitment from the council's base budget.

22. The council is required to utilise the funding within the terms of the grant. As and when any financial benefits of preventative services are identified, they will be reflected in future medium term financial strategies.

Comments checked by:

Jane Billington, Strategic Finance Business Partner,
jane.billington@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

23. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 received royal assent on 29th April 2026. The act provides the legal mandate and statutory powers, while the Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme serves as the national delivery model and funding mechanism to implement the associated social care reforms. The council is required to meet programme requirements in full by end March 2027 and to comply with the conditions of the Families First grant. Failure to fully implement reforms or comply with grant conditions, risks financial penalties and/ or enforcement action via the Department for Education. The council is also required to ensure that any decisions relating to its use are taken in accordance with the council's governance framework.

Comments checked by:

Craig Cochrane, Principal Lawyer, Child Care Team, Law and Governance,
craig.cochrane@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

24. The proposals involve the reconfiguration of existing arrangements and the deployment of grant-funded activity to support service delivery. These will be progressed in line with the council's policies and procedures.

Comments checked by:

Amy Warner, Strategic People Partner, amy.warner@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Equality & Inclusion Implications

25. The proposals aim to improve access to support for children and families and to ensure that services are delivered in a more coordinated and inclusive way. An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed as and when required.

Sustainability Implications

26. No specific sustainability implications have been identified at this stage.

Risk Management

27. The main risks relate to delivery within required timescales, alignment with national guidance, and financial management over the lifetime of the grant. These will be managed through programme governance and ongoing oversight.

Consultations

28. Engagement has taken place with staff and partner agencies as part of the development and pilot phases. Further engagement will continue as implementation progresses.

Lisa Lyons
Director of Children's Services

Annex: Nil

Background papers: Nil

Other Documents: Nil

Contact Officer: Delia Mann, Deputy Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help

July 2026