



**Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director - Children Services**

Report to:	<b>Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>19 April 2024</b>
Subject:	<b>Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme</b>

**Summary:**

This report is provided to enable the Scrutiny Committee to be updated on the progress of the implementation of the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme in Lincolnshire.

**Actions Required:**

The Committee is invited to review and comment on the development and implementation of the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme to ensure they are sighted on the scope of the programme and its key objectives.

## **1. Background**

In July 2023, the Department of Education (DfE) formally announced Lincolnshire (alongside Wolverhampton and Dorset) as one of the initial three national Families First for Children Pathfinders. The Pathfinder Programme is sponsored and managed by the DfE and will run between September 2023 and March 2025. Lincolnshire was selected as a Pathfinder in recognition of a long-standing track record as an improvement partner to other local authorities and because of its commitment to sector led learning. The Pathfinder goals are geared towards the creation of a future system where we support families in a new way, enhance their experience and develop a stronger multi-agency and expert child protection response.

Lincolnshire is recognised within the sector as an innovative and transformational authority and through the Pathfinder we are provided with positive opportunities to develop and evaluate new ways of working. Our approach around this has been to explore how existing service delivery and partnership collaboration could be further enhanced from its already solid foundation.

The pathfinder programme has been established as part of the government's children's social care implementation strategy which resulted in the publication of 'Stable Homes built on love' (Appendix A) which set out a response to recommendations from the independent review of children's social care and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review

Panel report on child protection. It provided the foundation for the creation of the Pathfinder Design Specification as a template for Lincolnshire to shape service delivery and the aspirations for how future delivery of services to children and families could be enhanced.

In addition, the Pathfinder programme draws on evidence and existing good practice, including from other government programmes:

- Start for life and Family Hubs.
- Supporting Families.
- Reducing parental conflict.
- Strengthening families, protecting children.

The Pathfinder brings to Lincolnshire approximately £5.7m of new funding over the duration of the programme. This has enabled us to shape plans which will result in the recruitment of up to forty new roles on a fixed term basis within Children Services across a wide range of specialisms, all aligned to our implementation plan. The pathfinder has been created to co-design and test new reforms across the following four work streams:

- **Pillar 1 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements** - Updated and strengthened local multi-agency leadership through changes to safeguarding partner arrangements. A proposal to progress education being seen as the fourth strategic safeguarding partner.
- **Pillar 2 Family Help** - Locally based, multi-disciplinary family help/early help services, providing intensive, non-stigmatising and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families.
- **Pillar 3 Child Protection** - A child protection response conducted by social workers with greater expertise and experience, and access to dedicated and skilled multi-agency input, working with Family Help to protect children who are suffering, or at risk of suffering, significant harm.
- **Pillar 4 Family Networks** - Greater use of family networks, with increased use of family group decision-making, facilitated by financial support through Family Network Support Packages to remove any financial or practical barriers family networks may face.

### **Key Progress and Milestones**

Following the announcement of Lincolnshire's status as a Pathfinder, there has been significant activity undertaken to fulfil the requirements and challenging timeframes set out by the DfE. This has resulted in the establishment of a dedicated project team and Pathfinder governance structures at both an executive and strategic level which includes our key partners to ensure their support and engagement within the programme. Partnership support to the programme has been invaluable and key roles within the project team have been established through secondments with Lincolnshire Police and the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

In addition, we have created a seconded head teacher role to ensure a dedicated focus on progressing our operational and strategic engagement with the education sector. At the outset of the programme, we have mapped our existing service offer and structures

against a design specification provided by the DfE, whilst then embarking upon an intense period of co-design in collaboration with our partners. This resulted in the development of a comprehensive implementation plan and an accompanying costed plan to set out how the grant funding would be used to achieve the programme objectives.

In Lincolnshire, extensive work has been undertaken in collaboration with key government agencies and local partners including Police, Health, and Education. The support and commitment of our local partnership agencies should be recognised and valued. It has promoted closer working relationships, explored creative solutions, and undoubtedly facilitated positive progress to this point and is clearly a strength of our multi-agency arrangements within Lincolnshire.

## **Implementation Plan – Key Features**

### **Pillar 1 – Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements**

- The focus of the work within this pillar has been centred around the changes to Working Together 2023 and identifying new options around the arrangements for the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) chair and how independent scrutiny will be provided across the Childrens' partnership.
- The appointment of a dedicated education coordinator role at headteacher level is enabling us to explore the possibilities and options around proposals for how education can engage as a fourth strategic safeguarding partner.
- Wide ranging work is being undertaken to improve information and data sharing across the partnership. We are providing additional capacity to support and equip staff with the knowledge and skills required to develop and trial the new ways of working.

### **Pillar 2 - Family Help**

- Through new recruitment in Family Help roles and increased resources, we are enhancing our support to external lead professionals to maximise their impact and minimise the potential for cases to escalate.
- We are providing additional resources through recruitment to support early years settings to reflect the specific needs of this cohort even sooner and promote the benefits of early intervention.
- We are committed to extending support to lead professionals around building family networks to create increased resilience and in building family network plans.

### **Pillar 3 - Child Protection**

- The focus in this pillar is the development of new multi-agency child protection teams (MACPT) and ensuring all social workers and other key practitioners are skilled and confident in this critical area of practice. This will be supported by specialist joint training and new requirements around knowledge and skills assessment for Social Worker's career progression.
- Additional support around education has been created through the establishment of four new Education Progress co-ordinator roles to work with children with an

allocated Social Worker. The roles will be a vital conduit in our engagement with education settings and in supporting schools around child protection and strategy meetings.

- Information sharing and collaboration will be enhanced by the creation of a new social worker co-ordinator role within the Police Safeguarding Hub at Grantham.
- We have provided the opportunity to re-model the roles of the Child Protection (CP) Chair and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The CP chair will provide a dedicated and crucial knowledge, expertise, and guidance within the newly established MACPT and become key advisors around casework.

#### **Pillar 4 - Family Networks**

- Within this pillar, we are committed to ensuring we continue our commitment to ensuring the use of Family Network meetings and maximising their benefits.
- This is also underpinned by the recruitment of additional Family Group Conference (FGC) Co-ordinators and supervisory staff to expand the offer across a wider cohort of families.
- DfE has provided Lincolnshire with ringfenced funding to provide financial support packages to family networks. This is geared towards promoting stability, and avoiding escalation to enable children remaining within the family home wherever possible and the funding can be used to provide innovative financial solutions within the family network to support this goal.
- A robust structure and process to support the Family Network Support Packages (FNSP) payments is being developed to ensure transparency, fairness, and compliance with existing regulations.

#### **Communication and Engagement**

Throughout the programme, we have sought to ensure clear communication with all the recognised stakeholders. This has included dedicated sessions within Children's Services staff briefings and team managers as the programme has developed. In addition, we have also embarked upon engagement within the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership in key forums to promote awareness. Communication and engagement planning has been undertaken with the key strategic partners to ensure a consistent approach and consistent key messages across all strategic partners. Finally, the Pathfinder has featured within all the recent briefings to education leads and head teachers across the county to highlight their ability to support the programme and understand its objectives.

#### **Evaluation/Oversight/Governance**

The DfE has now commissioned an independent evaluation partner to assess the impact of the programme, and this will be achieved through a wide range of approaches, both qualitative and quantitative. Dedicated performance resource has now been secured to the programme to ensure a focus upon reporting new measures related to the changes being introduced. Impact will be measured by an assessment of change over the duration of the pathfinder in the key areas corresponding to our implementation plan. It will also

reflect the experiences of children and families in their interactions with our services and seek the views of both operational and strategic leaders in that journey of service reform.

We will work in close collaboration with the evaluation partner over the coming months and recognise there is a vital need to capture the impact of service transformation to support the potential for sustainable funding solutions.

Oversight of the programme is undertaken by the DfE and is captured through monthly reporting meetings to assess progress against the identified milestones and financial monitoring by analysing spend against the projections within the costed plan. Those meetings provide opportunities to flag progress, potential barriers or emerging programme risks at an early juncture.

The internal governance of the programme is provided by the pathfinder executive group and this forum is independently chaired. It has representation from all key stakeholders at an executive board level and includes Councillor Mrs P A Bradwell OBE as the lead member for Children's Services.

### **Risks and Challenges**

The DfE element of the Pathfinder programme runs until 31 March 2025 and the ambition from central government is that the new reforms can demonstrate the necessary impact and be seen as integral and on-going elements of service delivery and funded accordingly. However, whilst this is clearly the aspiration, there are no financial guarantees provided beyond the funding already received within the scope of the current programme.

Consequently, financial sustainability has been a key consideration within our planning and influenced the decision for recruitment to new posts being undertaken on a fixed term basis. This is intended to minimise any future potential financial risks and enable a clearer picture of future government funding commitments which may emerge as we move forward in the programme.

Whilst we have rightly embraced the opportunities that exist within the Pathfinder, there is also no intention or willingness to progress or trial new areas of practice that could potentially undermine our strengths, expose new risks around complex case work, or create uncertainty in our working relationships with partner agencies.

Within several critical areas, we have held a robust stance in maintaining our current position to ensure long term credibility and stability. This includes the retention of the vital role of the social worker within Section 17 (Child in Need) work and the crucial role that the Independent Chair fulfils within Child Protection Conferences.

## **2. Conclusion**

Lincolnshire Children's Services has a longstanding and highly regarded record of delivering high quality services to children and families which has been externally validated through rigorous inspection. We place a high value upon restorative and relationship-based practice and have an exceptionally strong and mature early help offer which is understood and strongly supported by our partners. The Pathfinder aligns with our values and overarching objectives and presents an opportunity to capture and share learning for the benefit of Lincolnshire and the national children's services sector.

The Pathfinder programme provides Lincolnshire Children’s Services and our partners with a unique responsibility to design and evaluate innovative approaches in how we work with children and families moving forward. The programme is guided by the implementation plan and a milestones document to assess our progress at key intervals.

As we now move into the implementation phase, we are seeking to complete the recruitment of all the identified roles who will support the programme. The impact of the changes we implement will be captured both internally and through the appointed DfE evaluation partner. The assurance, monitoring and oversight of the programme continue to be managed through our established governance structures, and externally through the DfE.

**3. Consultation**

**a) Risks and Impact Analysis**

Not Applicable

**4. Appendices**

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Stable Homes, built on love - Department for Education (2023)

**5. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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