

Title of policy / procedure / function / project / decision:	Families First Partnership Programme
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Evidence based equality analysis

Main aims, purpose and outcomes and how does it fit in with the wider aims of the organisation:

Cheshire West and Chester is implementing the Families First Partnership Programme to create a stronger, more preventative system of support for children and families. The reforms are driven by national guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) and shaped by local priorities and family feedback, with a focus on:

- **Front Door Multi-Agency Working:** Strengthening “front door” arrangements with daily multi-agency conversations (including police, health, and education) to ensure early identification of need and proportionate information sharing. Family Help will be delivered by multi-disciplinary teams based in communities, offering holistic support and reducing the need for families to navigate multiple services.
- **Family Help:** Introducing a single assessment and plan for families, coordinated by a Family Help Lead Practitioner (social work or alternatively qualified), responsible for both assessment and direct intervention. This aims to reduce changes in worker and provide more consistent support.
- **Family Networks:** Expanding the Family Networks team to ensure earlier family group decision-making, with a national minimum expectation that meetings occur before the initiation of care proceedings to strengthen prevention and keep families together.
- **Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPT):** Establishing statutory multi-agency teams (social care, police, health, education) to oversee investigations, unblock barriers, and support decision-making, with a focus on quality assurance rather than direct case-holding.
- **Lead Child Protection Practitioners:** New specialist roles to chair conferences, support key decisions, and provide expert advice to Family Help Lead Practitioners.

Values and Practice: The reforms are underpinned by systemic, trauma-informed, and strengths-based practice, with a commitment to co-production, inclusion, and keeping families together wherever possible.

Services are being redesigned to comply with the Department for Education’s Families First Partnership Programme Guide ([FFP Programme guide: delivery expectations for statutory safeguarding partners in England: year 2 \(2026 to 2027\)](#))

and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act (2026): ([Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026](#)). National policy dictates the deadline for full implementation is March 2027. Internal arrangements are launching in July 2026, with a view to gaining learning and adapting before the national deadline. The reforms are highly prescriptive with regard to the services that should be offered within Cheshire West, where there is scope for interpretation the programme has aimed to learn from data and the views of families with lived experience of Children's Services to meet local needs.

Implementation is overseen by the Safeguarding Children Partnership, informed by staff consultation, feedback from families with lived experience of Children's Services and regular engagement with the DfE.

Feedback on existing services has been gathered from caregivers with lived experience of Children's Services. The Lived Experience Reference Group has encompassed a range of ages and backgrounds.

Lead officer: Amanda Perraton

Stakeholders: Children's Services Leadership and Staff, Children and Families Lived Experience Reference Group (on behalf of local families with experience of Early Help or Children's Social Care)

For each of the areas below, an assessment needs to be made on whether the policy has a positive, negative or neutral impact, and brief details of why this decision was made and notes of any mitigation should be included. Where the impact is negative, this needs to be given a high, medium or low assessment. It is important to rate the impact of the policy based on the current situation (i.e. disregarding any actions planned to be carried out in future).

High impact – a significant potential impact, risk of exposure, history of complaints, no mitigating measures in place etc.

Medium impact –some potential impact exists, some mitigating measures are in place, poor evidence

Low impact – almost no relevancy to the process, e.g. an area that is very much legislation led and where the Council has very little discretion

	Neutral	Positive	Negative
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Target group / area			
Race and ethnicity (including Gypsies and Travellers, refugees, asylum seekers etc.)	Redesigned services are intended to improve outcomes for children and families regardless of race or ethnicity, and does not in itself propose differential access, eligibility or treatment on the basis of ethnic background. If implemented consistently, services reformed under the Families First Partnership Programme (FFP) should be equally available to families from all communities. Translation services are available and incorporated into work with families. Children's services staff receive training on bias, there will be no change to this	The programme has the potential to improve access to coordinated support for children and families from racially and ethnically diverse communities, particularly where families may previously have experienced fragmented services, barriers to engagement or a lack of culturally responsive support. Stronger partnership working may help services identify and respond earlier to unmet need. The reforms encourage multi-disciplinary working, ensuring that families can receive support from workers responsive to their specific needs.	Data has not yet been gathered from the Lived Experience Reference Group on race and ethnic identity, as such it is not yet known whether this group has been sufficiently engaged. The service will seek out feedback from this group as the reforms are embedding. Medium impact.

	in the redesigned services.		
Disability (as defined by the Equality Act - a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities)	The FFP reforms are designed to support children and families based on need rather than disability status, and does not limit access for disabled children, young people, parents or carers. If reasonable adjustments are consistently made, the reformed services should operate equitably. We have reviewed feedback on the previous assessment process and drafted the new Children and Families assessment to ensure reasonable adjustments are made	FFP could have a positive impact by improving coordination across agencies for disabled children, young people and adults, reducing the burden on families of navigating multiple services and helping support plans reflect whole-family need. Early identification and joined-up working may improve access to the right support at the right time. The local approach to implementation strengthens capacity in our dedicated Children with Disabilities team, to ensure skilled staff have sufficient capacity to manage local needs.	Data has not yet been gathered from the Lived Experience Reference Group on caregivers' disability, as such it is not yet known whether this group has been sufficiently engaged. The service will seek out feedback from this group as the reforms are embedding. Medium impact.

	where parents have additional needs.		
Sex (male or female)	Reformed services will continue to be available to children, young people, parents and carers of any sex, with support based on presenting need and risk rather than sex. There is no intended differential treatment within the new service model.	The programme may have a positive impact where more coordinated support for family networks improves identification of the needs of male or female caregivers, including those who may previously have been less visible in services. A whole-family approach may support more balanced engagement of all caregivers.	Despite efforts to recruit a diverse set of families with experience of children's services to the Children's Services Lived Experience Reference Group, it has not yet been possible to gain detailed feedback from male caregivers. The service will seek out feedback from this group as the reforms are embedding. Medium impact.
Gender identity (gender reassignment)	The reforms are intended to support families on the basis of need and should not in itself create different access arrangements on the basis of gender identity. If delivered inclusively and respectfully, it should have a neutral impact.	The reforms could have a positive impact if integrated working enables more responsive and person-centred support for transgender and gender-diverse children, young people and family members, particularly where individuals require coordinated support across	Data has not yet been gathered from the Lived Experience Reference Group on gender identity, as such it is not yet known whether this group has been sufficiently engaged. The service will seek out feedback on the reforms from this group as the

		education, health and family services.	reforms are embedding. Medium impact.
Religion and belief (including lack of belief)	The reforms will not modify the role of children's services in supporting families regardless of religion, belief or non-belief, and does not prescribe differential access or treatment on that basis.	The reforms may have a positive impact where, through engagement with voluntary and faith sector organisations, Family Help practitioners take account of faith, belief and cultural context in planning support, helping services respond more appropriately to family circumstances and improve trust and engagement.	Data has not yet been gathered from the Lived Experience Reference Group on religious beliefs, as such it is not yet known whether this group has been sufficiently engaged. The service will seek out feedback on the reforms from this group as the reforms are embedding. Medium impact.
Sexual orientation (including heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual and others)	The reformed services will remain open to all children, young people and family members regardless of sexual orientation, with support determined by need	The reforms could improve outcomes where it enables more joined-up support for children, young people and parents who may otherwise experience fragmented responses or feel unseen within traditional service models. A more relational and whole-family approach	Data has not yet been gathered from the Lived Experience Reference Group on sexual orientation, as such it is not yet known whether this group has been sufficiently engaged. The service will seek out feedback on the reforms from this group as

		may support inclusion and earlier help-seeking.	the reforms are embedding. Medium impact.
Age (children and young people aged 0 – 24, adults 25 – 50, younger older people 51 – 75/80; older older people 81+. Age bands are for illustration only as overriding consideration should be given to needs)	Children's services will continue to support children, young people and families on the basis of need rather than age alone, and should operate fairly across age groups where eligibility and pathways are clear.	The reforms may have a positive impact by strengthening support across childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, and by improving how services work together around transitions and family needs. This may be particularly beneficial where families include multiple age groups with interconnected needs.	Direct feedback on the reforms has not yet been gained from young people with experience of Children's Services. The service will seek out feedback on the reforms from this group as the reforms are embedding. Medium impact.
Care Experienced (all young people and adults who have been in the care of Cheshire West and Chester Council - for a period of 13 weeks or more - from the age of 14 years. This includes those children/young people for whom the Council currently or have previously held	The reforms are intended to provide support based on need and will maintain equitable support for care experienced young people or adults. Services will remain joined up with existing	The reforms could have a positive impact as they strengthen prevention, coordination and relational support for care experienced young people and adults, particularly where they are parents themselves or need support that crosses	Direct feedback on the reforms has not yet been gained from care experienced parents. The service will seek out feedback on the reforms from this group as the reforms are embedding. Medium impact.

corporate parenting responsibilities)	corporate parenting responsibilities. The reforms do not directly affect Children in Care services, as such there will be neutral impacts for children currently in care.	service boundaries. More joined-up responses may identify need earlier.	
Carers (people who care for others, informally or formally)	The reforms are intended to support whole families and should not disadvantage carers where needs are identified and responded to appropriately.	The reforms should have a positive impact by reducing duplication, improving coordination and recognising the needs of carers within wider family support arrangements. This may be especially helpful for young carers and parents/carers who currently have to repeat their circumstances across services. The reforms explicitly encourage greater engagement with family networks in planning support for children, empowering carers to	

		develop their own plans to address professionals' concerns.	
Rural communities	The reforms are intended to support families across the borough and are not expected to exclude rural communities. Delivery arrangements will provide equitable access regardless of geography. Meetings such as Family Network meetings will be held in locations best suited to the family.	The programme could have a positive impact if multi-agency coordination reduces the need for families in rural areas to navigate multiple separate services and improves outreach, flexibility and earlier identification of need.	Data has not yet been gathered from the Lived Experience Reference Group on whether they live in rural areas, as such it is not yet known whether this group has been sufficiently engaged. The service will seek out feedback on the reforms from this group as the reforms are embedding. Medium impact.
Areas of deprivation (include any impact on people living in poverty who may not live in areas identified as deprived)	Reformed services are intended to support families according to need and should not disadvantage people living in deprived communities or in poverty.	The programme has strong potential for positive impact because families experiencing poverty often face multiple and interconnected pressures. More joined-up, earlier and whole-family support may help address cumulative need, improve access to	Data has not yet been gathered from the Lived Experience Reference Group on whether they live in areas of deprivation, as such it is not yet known whether this group has been sufficiently engaged. The service will seek out feedback on the reforms

		services and reduce escalation	from this group as the reforms are embedding. Medium impact.
Human rights (see guidance note for key areas to consider)	The Families First Partnership Programme is intended to strengthen support for children and families within the framework of existing law and statutory duties. It does not in itself remove rights or create new powers to interfere with individual freedoms. Reformed services should operate in a way that is compatible with human rights, including respect for private and family life, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression, the right to education and the prohibition of discrimination.	The reforms have the potential to promote human rights by helping children remain safely within their families wherever possible, supporting Article 8 rights to private and family life through earlier help, family network decision-making and more coordinated support. Multi-agency working may also improve fair and timely access to education, health and safeguarding support, and the strengths-based, inclusive approach should help reduce discrimination and improve participation for children, young people and parents in decisions that affect them.	There is a potential risk to human rights if information sharing, assessment or decision-making is not carried out lawfully, proportionately and with appropriate safeguards, particularly in relation to privacy, family life, non-discrimination and fair process. At present, there is limited direct evidence from families specifically framed around human rights impacts. Existing statutory frameworks, professional standards, oversight through the Safeguarding Children Partnership, and consultation with families provide mitigation, but the impact should be kept under review as

			implementation progresses. Low impact.
Health and wellbeing and Health Inequalities (consider the wider determinants of health such as education, housing, employment, environment, crime and transport, plus impacts on lifestyles and effects on health and care services)	The reforms are intended to improve coordination around children and families and do not in itself remove access to health or care support.	The reformed services will feature improved multi-disciplinary working, including the introduction of Family Help Recovery Practitioners, providing greater support to families affected by substance misuse. The reforms are include the principle of “one assessment, one plan” which encourages a holistic view of a family’s needs, inclusive of health needs. The reforms therefore aim to incorporate the wider determinants of health into a single plan for families with social needs.	There is a potential risk of negative impact on health and wellbeing if integrated working is not implemented consistently, or if families experience delays or barriers in accessing the right support across health, education and children’s services. Multi-agency governance, statutory safeguarding arrangements and continued partnership with health services provide mitigation, but the impact should be kept under review as implementation progresses. Low impact.
Procurement/partnership (if project due to be carried out by contractors/partners etc, identify	The Families First Partnership Programme is being delivered primarily through partnership working	The partnership model has the potential to improve equality by bringing together agencies around a single plan and reducing	There is a potential risk of unequal experience if partner agencies or commissioned providers apply thresholds, referral

steps taken to ensure equality compliance)	across statutory and wider agencies rather than through a single standalone contracted service. Some smaller contracted arrangements may be implemented to support delivery, for example enhanced substance misuse support. This does not in itself change the Council's legal duties in relation to equality, and any commissioned activity would be subject to equalities due diligence in line with commissioning practice in Cheshire West and Chester.	the burden on families of navigating multiple separate services. Stronger multi-agency working, alongside targeted commissioned support where needed, may support earlier identification of need, more coordinated responses and better access to support for groups who may otherwise experience fragmented pathways or inconsistent engagement.	pathways or equality duties inconsistently, or if joint working arrangements are not clear to families and practitioners. The Safeguarding Children Partnership, Children's Services leadership and commissioners will retain robust oversight of partnership and working commissioned providers in Family Help, ensuring specialist support is targeted where it can make the greatest difference, in line with equalities duties. Low impact.
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**Evidence (see guidance note for details of what to include here):
Lived Experience Reference Group Meeting 1**



LERG workshop
overview 02.10.25.ppt

Lived Experience Reference Group Meeting 2



Anonymised_LERG_Workshop_Summary.docx

Lived Experience Reference Group Meeting 3



LERG Feedback Meeting 12th May 2020

A total of 8 caregivers have attended at least one of the three workshops held to discuss the reforms. Outputs from these workshops has directly shaped practice in the new model, in particular through design of the new Children and Families Assessment.

Action plan:

Actions required	Priority	Outcomes required	Officer responsible	Review date
Continued gathering of feedback from families with lived experience of children's services, in particular where family members possess protected characteristics.	High	Deeper insight into particular groups' perspectives on how the national reforms are being implemented in Cheshire West and Chester	Zara Woodcock / Pip Rees	July 2027
Continued review of feedback received from families with	High	Where direct engagement with families possessing lived	Zara Woodcock / Pip Rees	July 2027

experience of children's services, in particular where family members possess protected characteristics.		experience of children's services with particular protected characteristics is not possible, efforts will be made to identify any feedback pertaining to these groups.		
Undertake a review of equalities data after implementation to identify whether any groups are experiencing different access, outcomes or unintended disadvantage.	Medium	Improved assurance that the redesigned model is operating fairly across different groups, with any emerging inequalities identified early and used to inform service improvement.	Zara Woodcock / Pip Rees	July 2027
Undertake a review of complaints, and feedback after implementation to identify whether any groups are experiencing different access, outcomes or unintended disadvantage.	Medium	Improved assurance that the redesigned model is operating fairly across different groups, with any emerging inequalities identified early and used to inform service improvement.	Zara Woodcock / Pip Rees	July 2027
Ensure communications to families about the change are accessible and understandable to all relevant groups.	Medium	Assurance that all families affected by the changes can understand what is happening	Zara Woodcock / Pip Rees/Simon Wood	July 2027

Sign off	Families First Partnership Programme Operational Steering Group 11/6/26
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Lead officer:	Amanda Perraton
Approved by Tier 4 Manager:	Zara Woodcock/Pip Rees
Moderation and/or Scrutiny	
Date:	23/06/2026
Date analysis to be reviewed based on rating (high impact – review in one year, medium impact - review in two years, low impact in three years)	