

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Children's Social Care National Reform: Initial Update	
REPORT OF Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding Director of Relational Practice, Children and Learning	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee	DATE 16 October 2025
SUMMARY OF REPORT This report provides an overview of the Children's Social Care National Reforms and details of the programme of work to design and deliver the reforms across Children Social Care in Camden. Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report. Contact Officers: Rashida Baig, Director of Children's Safeguarding and Family Help 5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AG 020 7974 3466 / Rashida.Baig@camden.gov.uk Nana Bonsu, Director of relational practice, Children and Learning 5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AG Nana.Bonsu@camden.gov.uk	
RECOMMENDATION Committee is asked to comment on and note the contents of the report.	

Signed:



Rashida Baig, Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding



Nana Bonsu, Director of Relational Practice, Children and Learning

Date: 3 October 2025

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to provide an initial update to the Committee on the programme's shape in Camden and gather any initial feedback from members on Camden's current implementation approach of the Children's Social Care National Reforms agenda.
- 1.2. Further updates on National Reforms will be coming to Committee as the programme progresses.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Children's Social Care National Reforms agenda aims to transform how support is delivered to families, with a focus on prevention, partnership and permanence.
- 2.2. In November 2024, the Government published a policy paper called 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive'. The paper included plans for comprehensive reform of children's social care in the UK and the Government's commitment to keeping families together and children safe. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which includes legislation to support the reforms, is currently moving through the parliamentary process and is due to reach its final stage later in 2025.
- 2.3. The 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive' paper has four main principles:
 - a. Children should remain with their families and be safely prevented from entering the care system
 - b. Children are supported to live with kinship carers or in fostering families, rather than in residential care
 - c. Concerns around profiteering in the children's social care market are addressed
 - d. We invest in the key enablers which underpin the children's social care system – including the workforce, better data and information sharing, and to scale and spread evidence-based programmes which have improved children's outcomes
- 2.4. In February 2025, the Government published the grant determination for the Families First Partnership Programme Transformation (Revenue) Grant for 2025-26. £270 million of new funding has been made available to local authorities to deliver against the planned new legislative duties. Camden have been allocated £826,132 from the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant for the 2025-26 financial year, to fund the reform transformation. A further £127,742 was allocated to be spent in this financial year in an announcement in August 2025, of an additional £18 million to support transformation. This means Camden's total allocation of funding for the reform transformation is £953,874 for this financial year.

- 2.5. In March 2025, the Government published the Families First Partnership Programme Guide which sets out the vision, objectives and practice change government expect to see to improve the support provided to children and their families.
- 2.6. Key aspects of the Families First programme include:
- a. Establishment of Family Help – the merging of Early Help and Child in Need functions, with multi-disciplinary professionals working together to address family needs in a collaborative way to ensure families receive joined-up support
 - b. Establishment of Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams – child protection being led by a joint team of local authority, police, education and health colleagues. The creation of a new ‘lead child protection practitioner’ role
 - c. Family group decision making – greater ownership from extended family or friends at first referrals
- 2.7. It is important to note that these Children’s Social care national reforms are coming at a time where there is also ongoing or impending significant reform expected in other parts of the system. There is an upcoming education white paper and expected Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reform. Connections are being made with these stakeholders and agendas to ensure interdependencies are addressed.
- 2.8. The engagement of partners, in particular the Police, Health and Education colleagues to design and deliver the multi-agency aspects of the reforms will be critical to the success of the development of the model.

3. Camden delivery of the Children’s Social Care National Reforms

Our vision

- 3.1. In Camden, we are incredibly proud of the work we do to protect and look after children – and our ‘outstanding’ ratings for our recent Youth Justice and Children’s Services inspections are testament to that. We have high-performing and effective multi-agency child protection teams, and we do everything we can to keep children with their families. We also heavily invest in early intervention and prevention because it’s proven to keep children with their families and reduce the number of children going into care.
- 3.2. But there are always areas that we can improve, and we always strive to do better for our children and young people. Building on the great work already being done in the community, our vision is a community-centred system where family networks are the first line of support, and professionals from social care, health, education, and police collaborate seamlessly to protect and empower children. We are doing this to:
- a. Reduce transitions for families, making it simple for them to access the right help quickly and effectively
 - b. Improve relationships between different parts of the system

- c. Reduce the disproportionality of the outcomes for our global majority families
- d. Make better use of the resources we have and ensure more join-up, so more children can stay at home / with extended family, and less children come into care

Impact on outcomes

- 3.3. An outcomes framework and set of relational metrics has been developed which will allow us to track the impact of the structural and cultural changes which are being implemented as part of the reforms.
- 3.4. Specific measures are being tracked at both a borough-wide level (to understand whether the reforms are leading to a reduction of the numbers of children in our statutory system) and to understand the impact for key groups which were identified in discovery work as having disproportionate outcomes.

Implementation approach and timeline

- 3.5. Camden's implementation approach consists of several phases.
- 3.6. Discovery Phase – January to May 2025: Camden invested five months in a comprehensive Discovery Phase to understand current service delivery, strengths, areas for improvement, and future demand. This work has laid the foundation for reform planning and partner engagement. Key activities included:
 - a. Reviewing case experiences across Early Years, Early Help, Youth, Child in Need, and Child Protection services
 - b. Exploring reform-oriented practices such as Family Group Decision Making, co-location, and multi-disciplinary teams
 - c. Analysing presenting needs including domestic abuse, disproportionality, and adolescent challenges
 - d. Co-designing solutions with staff and parents through a Design Group and Sounding Board
 - e. Benchmarking referral and assessment data with other inner London boroughs
 - f. Mapping workforce structures and commissioned services
 - g. Conducting a gap analysis of the outcomes framework and identifying demand hotspots
 - h. Developing a partner engagement strategy and communications plan
 - i. Establishing governance structures and initiating collaboration with North Central London partners
 - j. Sharing findings with staff, partners, and elected members
- 3.7. Phase One: Design, Test and Learn – June to December 2025: Camden developed a shared vision for Family Help and has entered a prototype phase to test and refine new approaches on a small scale from 8 September 2025. This phase focuses on learning what works in practice and preparing for wider implementation. Key activities include:

- a. Co-developing a shared vision for Family Help with partners and stakeholders
 - b. Launching prototypes: three Family Help teams, two Lead Child Protection Practitioner roles, embedded Family Group Decision Making, and a locality-based staffing model
 - c. Providing onboarding and training for prototype teams
 - d. Engaging voluntary and community sector partners and parent champions to strengthen local connections
 - e. Establishing governance to capture learning and assess impact
 - f. Defining key performance indicators and data requirements to monitor progress
 - g. Forming working groups with identified leads to drive delivery
 - h. Beginning development of system enablers including case management, IT, finance, and HR infrastructure
- 3.8. Phase Two: Implementation – January 2026 onwards: Building on the learning from the prototype phase, Camden will begin scaling and embedding the Family Help model across the borough from January 2026. This phase will focus on transitioning from small-scale testing to full implementation. Key activities include:
- a. Developing business cases to support borough-wide rollout
 - b. Implementing the full Family Help model informed by insights from the prototype phase

Prototype

- 3.9. On Monday 8 September, Camden launched a prototype in the East Neighbourhood, covering the Gospel Oak, Haverstock, Kentish Town North and South, and Camden Square wards. The prototype consists of three multi-agency teams made up of social workers, family support workers, youth workers, and domestic abuse specialists. It also includes two new Lead Child Protection Practitioner roles to provide expert safeguarding input. The teams are designed to work closely with council services, partners, and community representatives to ensure families receive coordinated, holistic support.
- 3.10. The East Neighbourhood was selected due to its high levels of demand and the opportunity to align with an existing test-and-learn initiative bringing together Adult Social Care and NHS Community Health teams at Kentish Town Health Centre. Selecting this geography would therefore enable cross-sector learning and collaboration.
- 3.11. Anticipated benefits of the prototype include:
- a. Stronger collaboration across services, leading to more connected support
 - b. Earlier intervention to prevent crises and reduce statutory involvement
 - c. More efficient use of resources through streamlined service delivery
 - d. Inclusive, anti-racist practice to promote equity
 - e. Family-centred support with fewer handovers and greater consistency
- 3.12. A structured learning and evaluation framework has been embedded into the prototype to ensure continuous improvement and inform future scaling.

Feedback will be gathered from families, frontline staff, and partners through regular reflection sessions, surveys, and case reviews. The Operational Reform Board (which meets fortnightly and is chaired by the two directors in Children's services) will oversee the monitoring of key performance indicators, and working groups will analyse data and practice insights to assess impact. Findings will be used to refine the model and shape borough-wide implementation from January 2026 with an expectation that the model of family help in Camden will be rolled out in time for the new financial year.

Learning from other local authorities

- 3.13. Camden has been connected with the North Central London local authorities to share practice, progress and challenges on a monthly basis. Camden has regularly attended learning sessions facilitated by the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA) to connect more widely across London in particular to hear from the London pathfinders Redbridge and Lewisham. Camden also met separately with several of the pathfinder LAs outside of London to learn from their approach to implementation including Devon and Walsall.

Key risks

- 3.14. The successful implementation of the Children's Social Care National Reforms in Camden is subject to several strategic and operational risks. Camden is proactively identifying and addressing these risks to ensure the programme is delivered effectively and sustainably.

Limited guidance from Central Government on reporting, data and case management

- 3.15. There remains uncertainty regarding the national expectations for data reporting, case management systems and performance metrics. This creates uncertainty in planning and may result in misalignment between Camden's local systems and national requirements. In order to mitigate against this risk, Camden is engaging with national networks and Department for Education (DfE) working groups to stay informed of emerging guidance. A flexible design approach is being adopted for digital and data systems to allow for future adaptation. Internal governance structures are being used to monitor developments and adjust implementation plans accordingly.

Impact of change on performance and service delivery

- 3.16. The scale of reform may disrupt existing service delivery, particularly during transition phases. Changes to practice models, staff roles, and workflows could temporarily affect performance indicators. In order to mitigate against this risk, a phased implementation plan is in place to minimise disruption and allow for iterative learning. Staff engagement and training programmes are being developed to support workforce readiness. Performance monitoring will

be enhanced during the transition period to identify and respond to emerging issues quickly.

Resource constraints in partner agencies

- 3.17. The success of the reforms depends on effective multi-agency collaboration. However, ongoing resource pressures in key partner agencies—particularly the police, health services, and education—may limit their capacity to engage fully in the reform programme. In order to mitigate against this risk, Camden is working closely with strategic partners to align priorities and explore joint resourcing opportunities. Partnership boards are being used to escalate and address cross-agency capacity issues. The programme includes a focus on streamlining processes and reducing duplication to ease pressure on partner agencies.

Governance

- 3.18. Camden has established a robust governance framework to oversee the delivery of children's social care reforms.
- 3.19. **Strategic Reform Board.** This board is responsible for Camden's partnership response to the national reform programme. It brings together statutory and wider partners to make strategic decisions informed by Department for Education guidance and Camden's local priorities. The board meets quarterly and is chaired by the Executive Director of Children and Learning.
- 3.20. **Operational Reform Board.** This board oversees the design and delivery of Camden's reform programme. It makes operational decisions aligned with Camden's strategic frameworks, including We Make Camden, The Way We Work, and Neighbourhoods. The board meets fortnightly and is co-chaired by the Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding and the Director of Relational Practice, Children and Learning.
- 3.21. **Working Groups.** A series of task-and-finish working groups have been established to drive implementation. These include groups focused on practice and culture change, evidence and data, the 0–19 universal and targeted offer, and the East Neighbourhood prototype. Groups meet regularly and are attended by officers across Children and Learning.

4. Finance Comments of the Director of Finance

- 4.1. This paper provides an update on the Children's Social Care National Reforms and details of the programme of work to design and deliver the reform transformations and implementation of new planned legislative duties across Children Social Care in Camden.
- 4.2. Camden received a total allocation of government grant funding of £953,874 for the financial year 2025-26, detailed in paragraph 2.4.

- 4.3. The planned use of the grant is summarised in the table below. The grant contributes to the cost of the proto-type team which draws on existing staff across various children's social care teams to test and learn a new model of delivery. The full cost of the East Prototype team is approximately £799,355 so the difference will be funded from existing General fund resources is approximately £274,925.

Planned use of grant	Estimated spend Apr 25-Mar 26
Test and learn - contribution to the East Prototype team	£524,430
PMO team and critical friend	£323,965
Test and learn - youth workers	£77,669
Health role	£25,500
Training	£2,310
	£953,874

- 4.4. The service is seeking approval for the option to carry grant into 2026-27 if any of the grant fund is underspent. At the time of this report, approval from the DfE to carry forward any underspend into the next financial year has not been received. Therefore the service would seek to fully utilise the grant in 2025/26 in accordance with the grant conditions. There will be a risk to the General Fund should unfunded project costs continue beyond 31st March 2026 without grant funding.

5. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

- 5.1. The Borough Solicitor has been consulted on the contents of this report and has no comment to make at this time.

6. Environmental Implications

- 6.1. There are no environmental implications arising from this report

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