



Families First Partnership Programme

A photograph of a family of four—two adults and two children—gathered around a table, looking towards the left side of the frame. They appear to be engaged in a presentation or a collaborative activity. The room is bright, with large windows in the background showing greenery outside. A dark teal banner with white text is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

The national picture

Driver for Change

The landscape of children's social care in England is undergoing a period of significant transformation:

- In 2022, a series of pivotal national reviews and reports were published by the Department for Education (DfE), including the Independent Review of Children's Social Care led by Josh MacAlister, the National Safeguarding Panel's Review into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the Competition and Markets Authority's investigation into the children's social care market. These reviews highlighted systemic challenges in the way children's social care services were being delivered.
- In November 2024, the newly elected Labour government published its policy statement, *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive*, setting out their vision to reimagine the children's social care and safeguarding system. Central to this vision was the establishment of the Families First Partnership Programme (FFPP) - a national initiative designed to drive forward the transformation of practice and the way in which services are organised and delivered, ensuring that children and families receive the right help at the right time.
- In December 2024, the government introduced the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, aiming to legislate for strengthened multi-agency safeguarding responsibilities.

Driver for Change

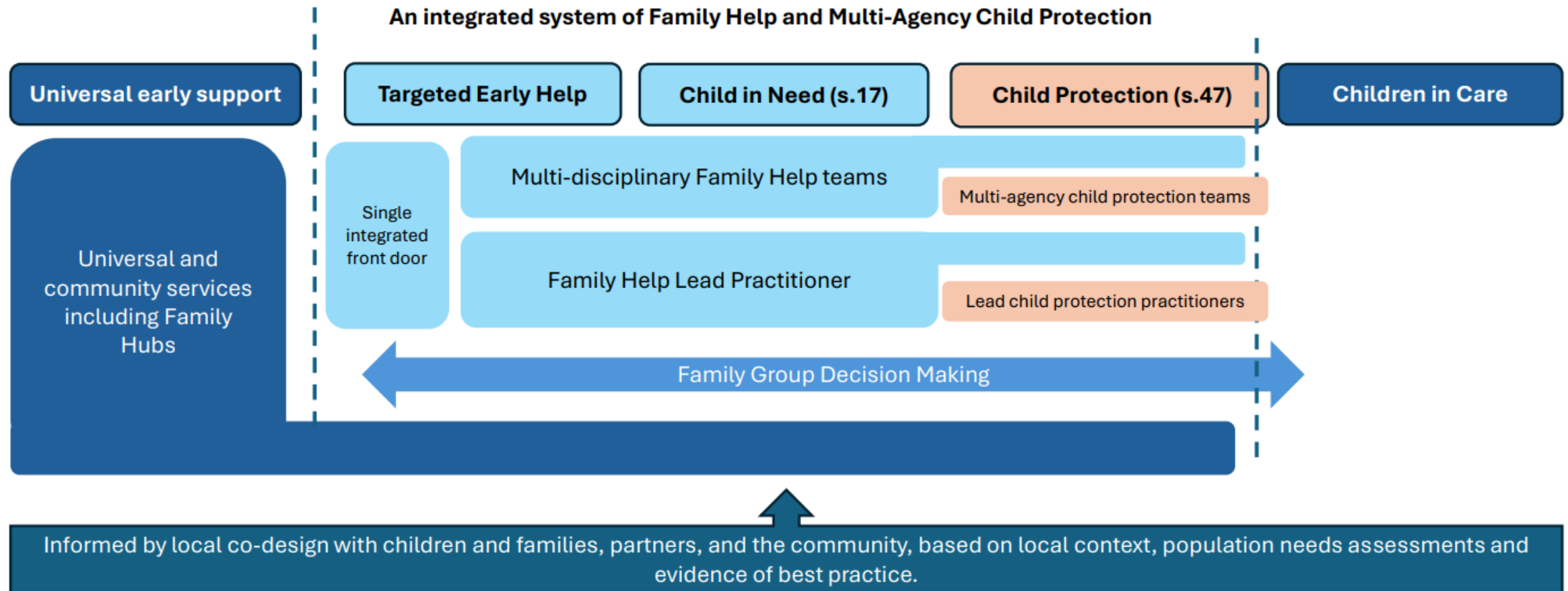
In March 2025, the DfE published further details of the FFPP, outlining a national programme of reform that seeks to:

- **Transform the system of help, support and protection** to improve outcomes and experiences for children and families, bringing targeted early help and child in need together.
- **Shift the focus from reactive crisis intervention to early, preventative support** that helps families and reduces the need for repeated assessments.
- **Develop non-stigmatising, accessible services** that are rooted in local communities.
- **Introduce a single Family Assessment and Plan** that stays with the family and is updated as needed
- **Establish services which wrap whole-family and multi-disciplinary support** around children and their families.
- **Embed Family Group Decision-Making** to empower families to find their own solutions, build resilience, and reduce the need for statutory intervention.
- **Strengthen multi-agency child protection arrangements** to ensure robust and timely responses to intra- and extra-familial harm.

National Objectives of the Programme

The Families First Partnership Programme takes a whole-system approach to rebalancing children's social care toward earlier intervention – strengthening multi-agency child protection is central

Locally designed systems that meet the needs of the population with effective, integrated and joined up services with partners



Family Help Teams

Family Help reforms do not start from a blank canvass – they build on evidence of what works from a range of programmes and best practice championed by LAs and their partners, including:



Programme	Key feature of Family Help
Supporting Families Programme	Family Help will build on the ‘whole-family’ lead practitioner led approach championed by the programme, which has supported over 600k families to make positive changes to their lives.
Family Safeguarding (Innovation Programme)	Evidence of bringing together professionals and social workers into co-located multi-disciplinary teams is at the heart of Family Help.
Family Valued (Innovation Programme)	The programme evidenced greater use of Family Group Conferencing and the power of strengths-based practice to enable families to plan their own lives effectively
Family Hubs	The Family Hub approach of placed-based working and joining up of services locally will feed into the Family Help approach – we also expect Hubs (where they exist) to help facilitate co-location of different workforces.
Families First for Children Pathfinders	For the last 18 months we have been trialling reforms in 10 local areas . We have learned a lot about the importance of the local co-design process. Learning and resources will be made available on the Local Government Association’s Knowledge Hub in due course.

Family Help Teams

Family Help aims to improve outcomes by quickly addressing needs, enabling children to thrive and stay safely with their families. It will operate within communities, uniting local services through a combined, multi-disciplinary practice approach, that wraps support around families at the point of need.

It is underpinned by the following key principles:

- wrapping support around the **whole-family at the earliest opportunity** – using the expertise of **multi-disciplinary** practitioners to provide holistic support;
- ensuring **consistency of relationships** between children, families and their lead practitioner;
- and **adopting one plan** that will stay with families but adapt as needs change.



Family Help is for children and families with multiple and/or complex needs including those currently eligible for **targeted early help** or receiving support and services as a **child in need**, and those subject to **child protection enquiries and plans**.

Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams

***The Independent Review of Children's Social Care and Child Protection in England (2022)* set out key recommendations for improving multi-agency child protection**

What the reviews found

Social work expertise

- Direct work with children and families is often undertaken by inexperienced practitioners
- There are no requirements for specific training or certified roles post-qualification

Multi-agency working

- Work across agencies is fragmented and fractured
- Information-sharing and multi-agency decision making is poor

Extra familial harm (EFH)

- Framework unsuitable. Fails to identify and respond to specific risk
- Too often blames parents
- Multi-agency working is a particular challenge

Parental engagement

- Parents report poor experiences and struggling to navigate processes
- Poor parental engagement is a contributing factor to serious incidents.

What the reviews recommended

Ensure those responding to significant harm have the **highest level of skill and knowledge**

Fully integrate multi-agency working and improve information sharing

A bespoke child protection response for all harm types - including EFH, domestic abuse and child sexual abuse

Effectively engage and support families where there are child protection concerns

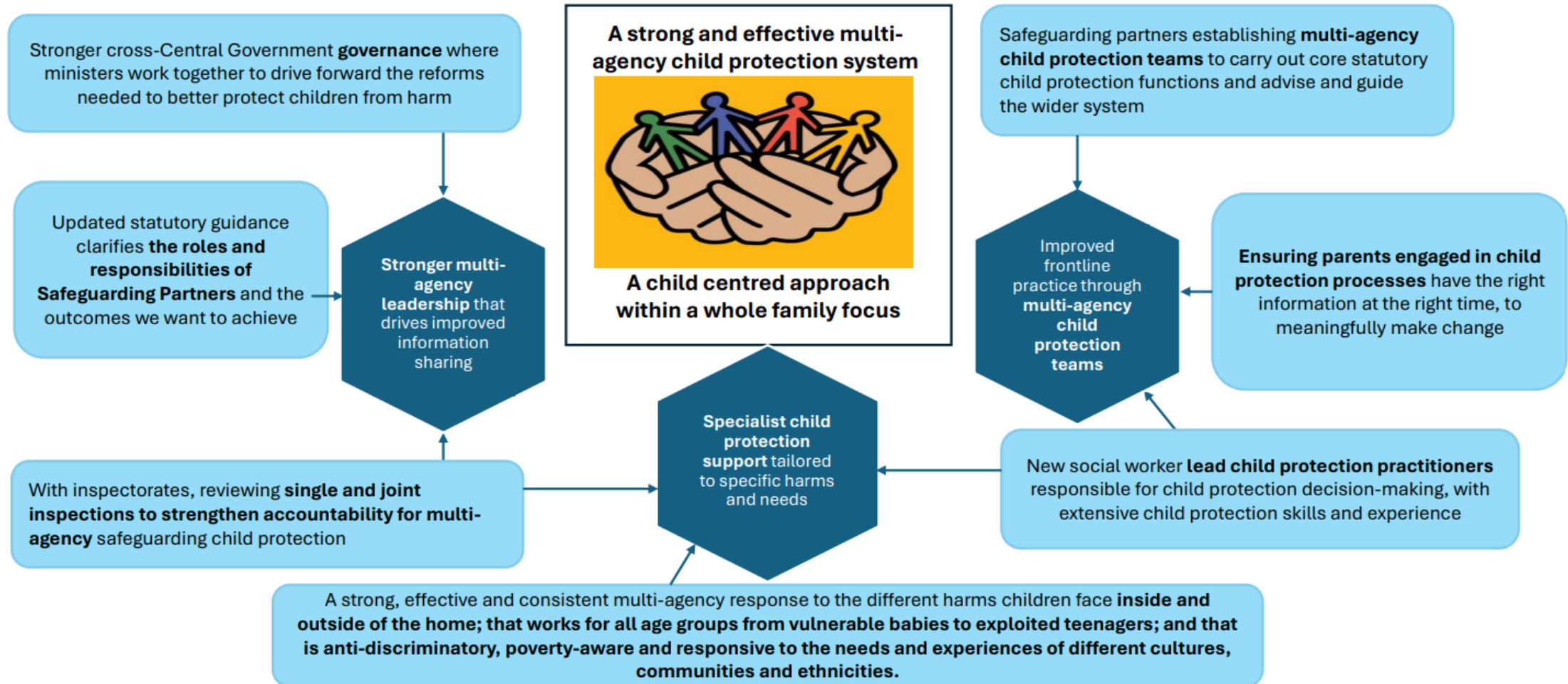
Where children are at risk of harm, we should intervene decisively through an expert and multi-agency child protection response

Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams

Our vision for multi-agency child protection



Effective multi-agency child protection is a system where the right decisions are made at the right time for children to keep them safe and recover from harm



These reform aims are embedded in the Families First pathfinder programme and reflected in our legislative priorities

Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams

Functions of the multi-agency child protection teams

- MACPTs will **work closely alongside Family Help Lead Practitioners (FHLP)**, who will retain their role with the family throughout child protection activity with MACPT support and oversight.
- Child protection enquiries and plans should build on information and activity set out in the existing **single family help assessment and plan** - or inform one where the child is not already known to Family Help.
- Working Together currently requires child protection conferences to be chaired by a social worker independent from the line management for the lead practitioner. The **LCPP role** will fulfil this function.

Specific MACPT functions include:

- chairing **strategy meetings** and **child protection conferences**
- leading **section 47 enquiries**
- leading or overseeing single or multi-agency **investigations** (as required)
- overseeing the development, review and closure of **child protection plans**
- initiating **emergency action**
- building in **family group decision making** and **family network engagement**
- input to **onward planning** for children and families
- providing **advice and consultation** for practitioners
- deciding whether to move into **pre-proceedings** and the **Public Law Outline (PLO) process**, providing relevant evidence to **court proceedings**
- maintaining an **understanding of local patterns** of significant harm and **agency responses**
- **oversight of all children subject to child protection processes** and line of sight to and from the **local safeguarding partnership**



The Hertfordshire picture

Driver for Change

The Hertfordshire Families First Partnership Programme Needs Assessment, undertaken in 2025, provided a robust evidence base for these proposals. It highlighted that, while Hertfordshire has strong foundations in practice and innovation, there remain areas where outcomes for children and families could be improved.

The Needs Assessment identified:

- Inconsistent access to preventative support across localities, leading to variable experiences and outcomes for families.
- Fragmentation of children and families' involvement with services, leading to multiple transfer points, repeated assessments and families having to tell their story multiple times.
- Workforce pressures, including high workloads and challenges in recruitment and retention in social work teams, which risk undermining the stability and quality of support.
- Disparities in service access and outcomes for children and families in areas of higher deprivation and need.
- The need for stronger multi-agency coordination and more effective partnership working with schools, health, and community organisations.
- That the experiences and views of Hertfordshire children and families closely aligned with those from across the country and which informed the MacAlister Care Review.

These findings have directly shaped the design principles and objectives of the proposed reforms, ensuring that the new model addresses both national expectations and local priorities.

Our Vision

To integrate the current functions and resources of Intensive Family Support, Assessment, Specialist Adolescent Services, and Family Safeguarding into four new team types:

Family Help Teams Delivering early and preventative support for children and families to safeguard and promote welfare, reduce escalation, and help families stay together safely.

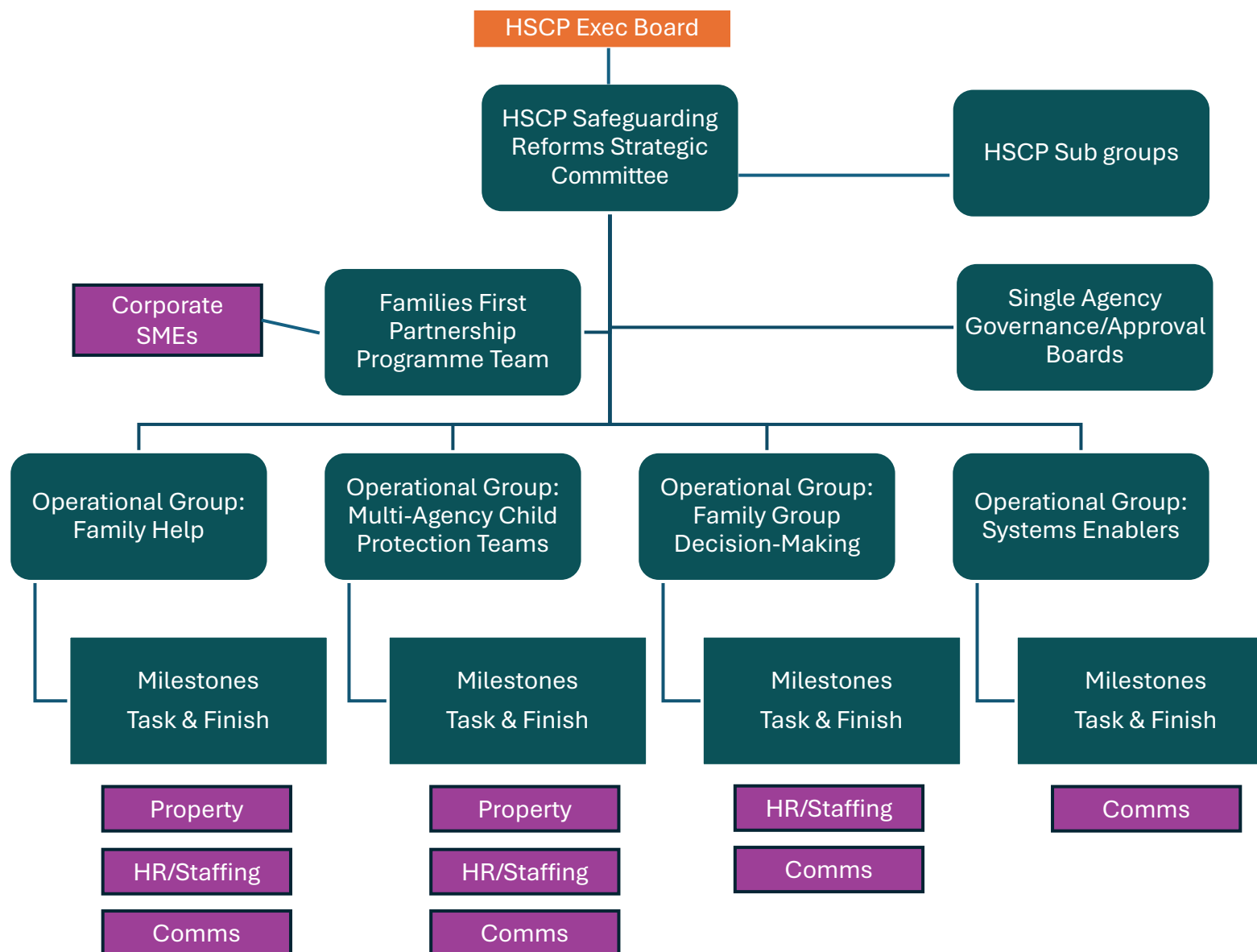
Family Safeguarding Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams Providing robust statutory interventions for children who need support through child protection enquiries, child protection plans, pre-proceedings, and care proceedings.

Locality Specialist Support Teams Multi-disciplinary teams offering targeted interventions and forming part of the team around the family alongside Family Help and Family Safeguarding Multi-Agency Child Protection teams, ensuring the right support is wrapped around families at the right time.

East/West Specialist Support Teams Delivering specialist interventions for specific groups of children and families, including those with complex or high-risk needs.

This model reflects the FFPP's emphasis on whole-family, non-stigmatising, community-based support, and will enable us to reduce transfer points, improve continuity of relationships for families, and ensure that families experience a joined-up service.

Families First Partnership Programme Governance



Workstreams and key milestones

Family Help



- ☐ Develop FH Model
- ☐ Complete Safeguarding Docs
- ☐ Develop Multi Agency Workforce Development Plan
- ☐ Develop FH Lead Practitioner Role
- ☐ Develop Framework for Multi-Disciplinary Family Help Teams
- ☐ Develop FH Assessments and Plans
- ☐ Implement QA measures
- ☐ Implement integrated front door for all services
- ☐ Complete engagement with services and local partnerships

Multi Agency Child Protection Teams



- ☐ Establish new multi-agency child protection teams
- ☐ Develop Lead Child Protection Practitioner Role
- ☐ Update information, support and advice offer for parents and carers
- ☐ Implement QA measures

Family Group Decision Making

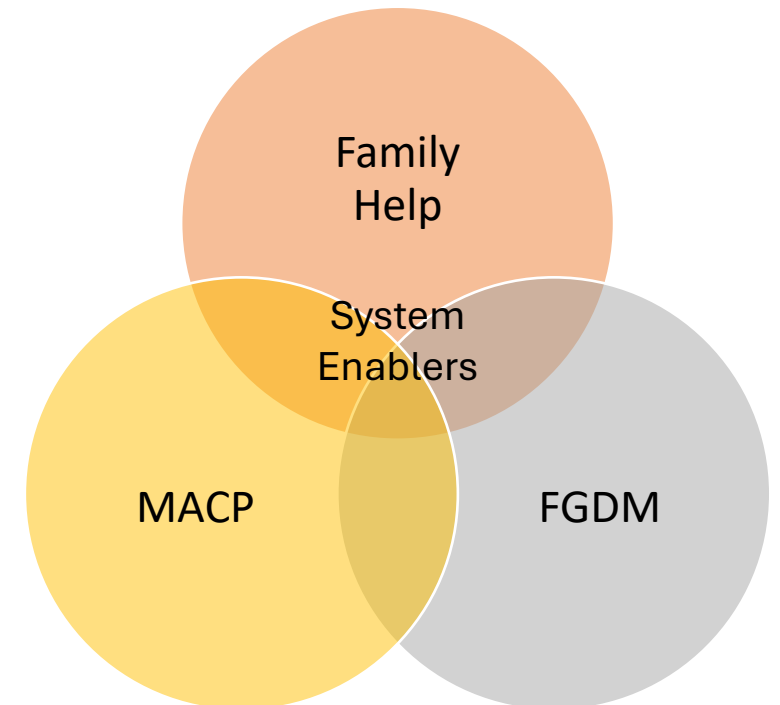


- ☐ Strengthen Family Group Conference (FGC) offer
- ☐ Embed Family Network meetings In Family Help
- ☐ Implement QA Measures

System Enablers



- ☐ Develop and implement information sharing requirements
- ☐ Develop and implement case management system requirements



Workstreams to support transformation

SEND

Disabled
children

One assessment
and one plan

Practice guides
and documents

Front door

Student social
workers

Homelessness

Community
partnerships and
services

Family Help
Lead Practitioner
role

Lead Child
Protection
Practitioner role

Severely absent
pupils with out of
school barriers

Business
support

Risk outside the
home

Intersecting
needs

Family
Safeguarding

Our Subject Matter Experts

The subject matter experts work collaboratively in the multi agency programme team. Their role is to co-design local children's social care and safeguarding arrangements to reflect the national reform requirements, feeding in views, perspectives and ideas in and from their professional communities. This involves leading communication, engagement and consultation with their own agency colleagues and contributing to the programmes decision-making about new models and ways to working which help and protect children.

Education and Schools – Sharon Coubray, Hertfordshire Education -
Sharon.Coubray@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Police – DCI Pete Howlett-Bolton, Hertfordshire Constabulary - peter.howlett-bolton@herts.police.uk

Health – Chris Harvey and Jen Sarsby, Hertfordshire and West Essex (Central East from April 2026) Integrated Care Board - chris.harvey2@nhs.net and jen.sarsby1@nhs.net

Children's Social Care – Jennifer Weeks, Hertfordshire Children's Services -
Jennifer.Weeks@hertfordshire.gov.uk

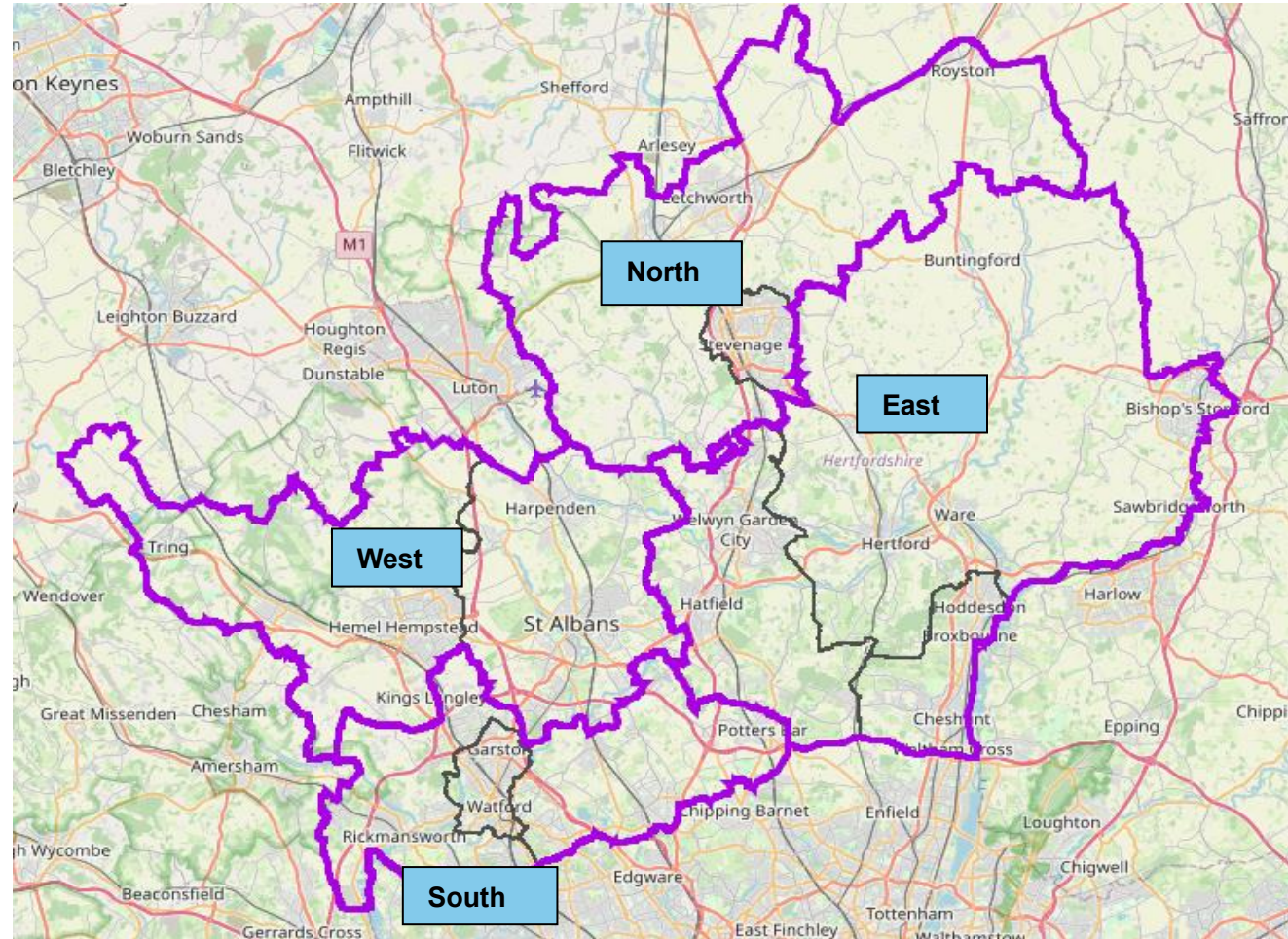
Confirmed Localities

West

St Albans
Dacorum

South

Watford
Three Rivers
Hertsmere



North

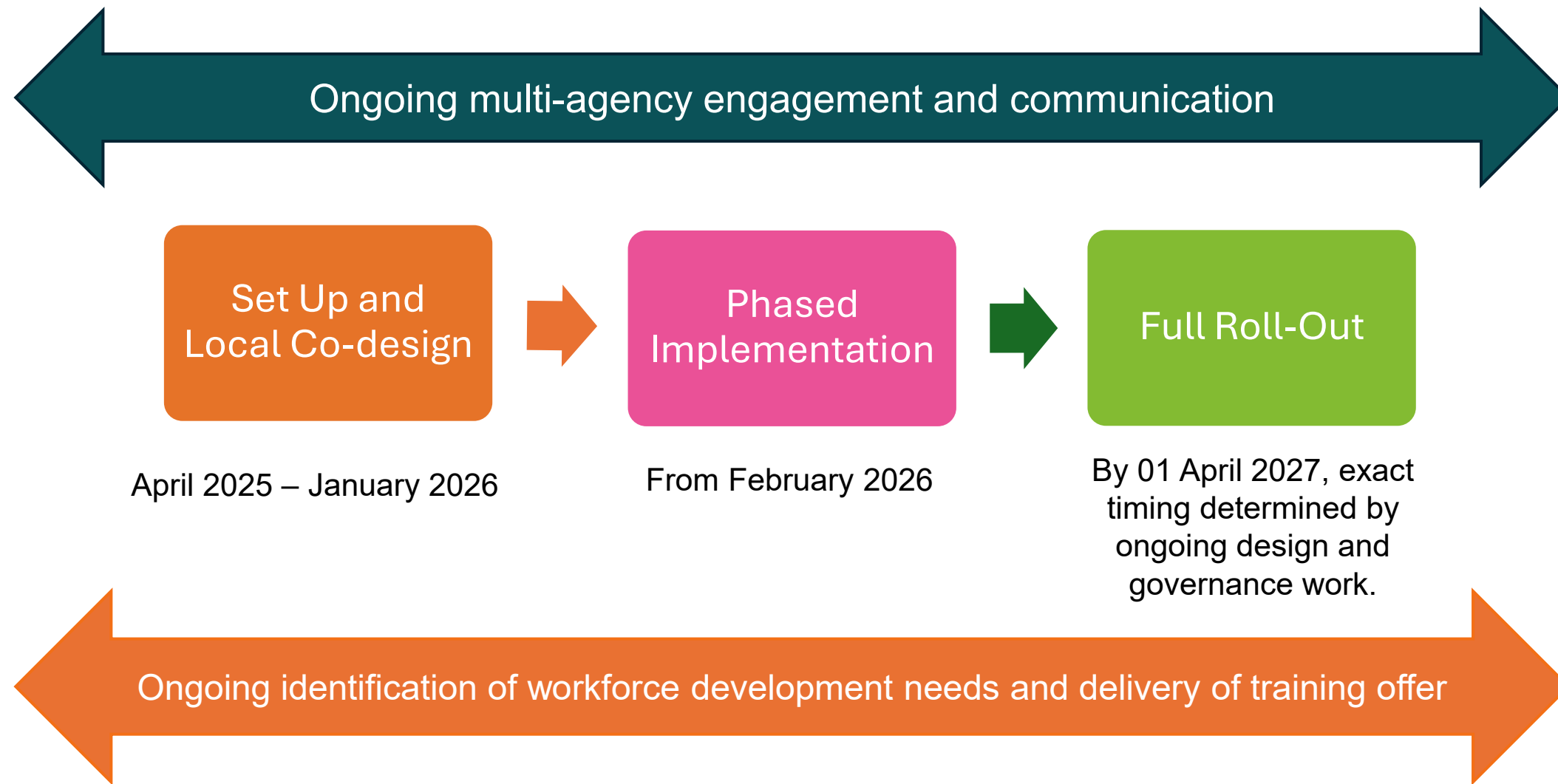
North Herts
Stevenage

East

Broxbourne
East Herts
Welwyn &
Hatfield

The geographical split is in line with what is currently used by many of our Children's Service resources and for future SEND provision. It will help us build networks and relationships with colleagues working in these areas, including our schools. It is aligned with Hertfordshire's Local Government Reorganisation final options, as much as is possible currently.

Delivery Timelines





Hertfordshire