



Democratic Services

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**To: COUNCILLOR SUSAN O'BRIEN
CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULTS, CHILDREN,
HEALTH & CARE**

c.c. All Members of the Children, Families, Health & Care Select Committee
c.c. Julie Kelly, Corporate Director of Children's Services
c.c. Valentin Danciu, Assistant Director – Family Help

Date: 30 October 2026

Non-Key Decision request

Form D

Hillingdon Family Help Strategy 2026–2031

Dear Cabinet Members,

Attached is a report requesting that a decision be made by you as an individual Cabinet Member. Democratic Services confirm that this is not a key decision, as such, the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 notice period does not apply.

You should take a decision **on or after Monday 9 November 2026** in order to meet Constitutional requirements about publication of decisions that are to be made. You may wish to discuss the report with the Corporate Director before it is made. Please indicate your decision on the duplicate memo supplied and return it to me when you have made your decision. I will then arrange for the formal notice of decision to be published.

Liz Penny
Democratic Services

Title of Report: Hillingdon Family Help Strategy 2026–2031

Decision made:

Reasons for your decision: (e.g. as stated in report)

Alternatives considered and rejected: (e.g. as stated in report)

Signed Date.....

Cabinet Member for Adults, Children, Health & Care

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Cabinet Member

30 October 2026

Hillingdon Family Help Strategy 2026–2031

Cabinet Member Lead	Cabinet Member for Adults, Children, Health & Care (Cllr O'Brien)
Chief Officer responsible	Corporate Director of Children's Services
Report author	Valentin Danciu, Assistant Director – Family Help

Report classification and reason	Public For General Release
Relevant Committee	Children, Families, Health & Care
Electoral Ward	All Wards

1. Executive Summary

This report asks the Cabinet Member to approve the Hillingdon Family Help Strategy 2026–2031. The strategy sets out how the Council and its partners will help children and families whose needs go beyond what universal services can meet, and how they will protect children at risk of significant harm. It brings together targeted early help, support for children in need, multi-agency child protection and Family Group Decision Making, as required by the national Families First Partnership Programme and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026. It replaces the Stronger Families Strategy 2021–2025.

Hillingdon has been an early adopter of the reforms. Its locality-based Family Help service launched on 27 August 2025, with full implementation across all areas expected by the deadline of April 2027.

The strategy consolidates national reform expectations, parental and children's needs and feedback and sets the partnership's direction to 2031. It sets one vision, six priorities and six outcomes for children, with shared measures, baselines and targets; commitments from every partner, including the police, health, schools, housing and the voluntary sector; and clear governance through the Family Help Delivery Group, the Executive Transformation Group and the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership. It supports all six Council Priorities 2026–2030 and the High Five Children's Services Commitments and is aligned with the Best Start in Life Strategy, the Care Strategy, the SEND Reform Plan and the Youth Justice Strategy.

The strategy was co-produced between May and October 2026 with partners, parents and practitioners. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (Appendix B) finds that it is expected to have a positive impact across all protected characteristics and sets out actions to mitigate the potential negative impacts it identifies, starting with reporting the equality profile of the families who receive Family Help.

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The strategy does not in itself commit the Council to new spending. It will be delivered within existing budgets and national Families First grant funding.

2. Recommendation(s)

That the Cabinet Member for Adults, Children, Health & Care:

- 1) Approves the Hillingdon Family Help Strategy 2026–2031 set out in Appendix A, which replaces the Stronger Families Strategy 2021–2025;**
- 2) Notes the engagement with partners, parents, carers and practitioners that has shaped the strategy, as summarised in section 7 of this report;**
- 3) Notes the Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment at Appendix B and agrees its action plan;**
- 4) Notes that the strategy is a partnership strategy and will also be presented to the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership for endorsement;**
- 5) Delegates authority to the Corporate Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, to make minor or non-material amendments to the strategy before publication, including its final design, accessible and community-language versions, data updates and the annual refresh of its delivery plan.**

3. Reasons for decision

- 1) The Council and its statutory safeguarding partners must implement Family Help, multi-agency child protection and Family Group Decision Making under the Families First Partnership Programme and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, with the reforms fully in place by March 2027. An approved strategy gives the partnership a clear, shared direction, and replaces a strategy that ended in 2025.
- 2) The strategy has been co-produced with partners, parents and practitioners, and the decision should take account of what they said and how it has shaped the strategy.
- 3) The Council must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty. The assessment shows the strategy is expected to have a positive impact, and its action plan addresses the potential negative impacts identified.
- 4) Under Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, Family Help and multi-agency child protection are shared responsibilities. Endorsement by the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership secures every partner's commitment and accountability.

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- 5) The delegation allows the strategy to be kept accurate, accessible and up to date without a further formal decision for minor changes. Any significant change of direction would return to the Cabinet Member.

4. Proposal

National and local context

1. The Families First Partnership Programme is the government's reform of family support and child protection in England. It requires local safeguarding partners to bring targeted early help and support for children in need together into a single Family Help offer, to set up multi-agency child protection teams, and to involve wider family networks through Family Group Decision Making. The programme guide (Year 2, March 2026) expects the reforms to be fully in place by March 2027.
2. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 (Royal Assent 29 April 2026) puts multi-agency child protection teams, the offer of family group decision-making and new information-sharing arrangements, including a single unique identifier for children, on a statutory footing. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 and the Children's Social Care National Framework 2026 set out what partners must do.
3. The Stronger Families Strategy 2021–2025, which set the direction for early help, has ended.

What the strategy sets out

4. **Vision:** every child in Hillingdon grows up safe, happy, healthy, loved and able to thrive, supported by strong families, connected communities, and help that arrives early and makes a lasting difference.
5. **Six priorities:** help from professionals that families know and trust; the right support early; children and families at the centre of decisions and plans; strong local networks; professionals working together; and keeping children safely within their families.
6. **Six outcomes:** children are safe and protected from harm; their needs are identified early and addressed; they are happy and healthy; learning, engaged and thriving; living in stable and loving homes; and have positive relationships and social connections. Progress will be tracked through shared measures, with baselines and targets agreed by the Family Help Delivery Group by December 2026, using targets already set in other Hillingdon strategies where they exist, and the Department for Education's quarterly Families First indicators.
7. **How we work:** the STARS practice model (strengths-based, trauma-informed, aspirational, relational and safety-driven), shared with the Care Strategy and the Best Start in Life Strategy; one front door, one assessment and one live plan, so families tell their

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story once; Family Group Decision Making and Family Network Support Packages; advocacy and family voice; and equality and anti-racist practice.

8. **Partnership commitments:** Chapter 7 of the strategy sets out what each partner will do differently, including the police, health (the integrated care board, community and hospital providers and GPs), schools and early years settings, housing, the Hillingdon Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service, Best Start Family Hubs and the voluntary, community and faith sector. Each partner will name a lead through the Family Help Delivery Group.
9. **Delivery and governance:** the delivery plan runs to March 2027, when Families First requirements must be fully embedded, and then into annual cycles of improvement to 2031, with a full review in 2029. The Family Help Delivery Group coordinates delivery and reports to the Executive Transformation Group, which brings the statutory safeguarding partners together monthly and is accountable to the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership. An annual report will come to the Cabinet Member.

Alignment with council and partnership plans

10. The strategy delivers the Council Priorities 2026–2030 (section 6) and the High Five Children's Services Commitments, which are mapped in the strategy and set out in full at its Appendix 8. It is aligned with the Best Start in Life Strategy 2026–2031, under which Family Hubs become the main front door for early support, including for children with SEND; the Care Strategy 2025–2030; the SEND Reform Plan 2026–2029; and the Youth Justice Strategy 2024–2029.

5. Corporate implications

Financial (mandatory)	Y	Equalities impact assessment	Y
Legal (mandatory)	Y	Workforce	Y
Alternative options (mandatory)	Y	Public Health	
Risk management (mandatory)	Y	External partners	Y
Heathrow Expansion (new)	Y	Communications	Y
Asset		Committee comments	
Procurement & contract social value		Digital	Y
Planning		Other	
Climate Change		Other	

a) Financial

The Hillingdon Family Help Strategy 2026-2031 is a strategic framework and does not, in itself, commit the Council to any additional expenditure beyond that already approved through the budget-setting process. Delivery of the strategy will be met from existing Children's Services budgets together with government grant funding received to support the implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme.

Classification:

Part 1 Public

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The strategy is intended to strengthen early intervention and family support arrangements, which may contribute to improved outcomes for children and families and help manage future demand pressures across Children's Services.

Any future proposals arising from the implementation of the strategy that have additional financial implications for the Council will be subject to separate financial appraisal, consideration through the Council's governance processes and, where required, approval through the Medium Term Financial Forecast and budget-setting process.

There are therefore no direct additional financial implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report.

Legal

The strategy is grounded in statutory requirements under the Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004, and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026. These Acts collectively mandate the implementation of Family Help, multi-agency child protection teams, and Family Group Decision Making. The strategy also aligns with statutory guidance, including "Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026," ensuring compliance with national reforms. There are no legal impediments to the recommendations in the report.

- the Children Act 2004, including section 10 (co-operation to improve children's wellbeing), section 11 (arrangements to safeguard and promote welfare) and sections 16E to 16K (local safeguarding arrangements with the police and integrated care board);
- the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, as its provisions on multi-agency child protection teams, family group decision-making and information sharing come into force;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, which is statutory guidance the council must follow under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970;
- the Equality Act 2010, section 149 (Public Sector Equality Duty), which the Cabinet Member must have due regard to in making this decision (section 5e and Appendix B);
- the Human Rights Act 1998, in particular Article 8 (respect for private and family life). Interventions must be lawful, necessary and proportionate; and
- UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, which apply to information sharing under the strategy.

The decision falls within the Cabinet Member's delegated authority and is listed on the Forward Plan. The strategy does not change any statutory threshold or service eligibility, and does not propose closing or reducing any service, so no statutory public consultation is required. Any future service change arising from it would be subject to its own consultation and equality assessment.

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b) Alternative options

<i>Alternative Options</i>	<i>Rationale for rejecting option</i>
Option A – A council-only Children's Services strategy	Rejected. Family Help and multi-agency child protection are shared responsibilities under Working Together 2026 and the Families First programme. A council-only strategy would not secure the commitments of the police, health, schools, housing and the voluntary sector.
Option B – Delay until national guidance is final or the MACPT is fully implemented	Rejected. National guidance will continue to evolve, and delay would hold back the shared commitments and governance needed to meet the March 2027 deadline. The annual review allows the strategy to be updated as guidance changes.
Do nothing	Rejected. The Stronger Families Strategy 2021–2025 has ended and predates the national reforms. Without a strategy, the partnership would lack a shared, published direction, outcomes and accountability, and the council would be less able to demonstrate its arrangements to Ofsted and the Department for Education.
Cease activity	Not viable. The council has statutory duties to children in need and children at risk of significant harm, and must implement the Families First reforms. National funding for Family Help is linked to delivering them.

c) Risk management

<i>Risk</i>	<i>Mitigation</i>
Partners do not have capacity to take on lead practitioner roles or Multi-Agency Child Protection Team membership	Commitments agreed in the strategy and named leads confirmed through the Family Help Delivery Group; joint training; unresolved issues escalated to the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership.
Demand and complexity keep rising (neglect, domestic abuse, SEND, harm outside the home)	Earlier help through Family Hubs and localities; quarterly review of demand data; resources targeted where need is greatest.
Long waits for specialist services leave families without help	Interim support agreed between partners; escalation to the integrated care board and SEND partnership.
Workforce recruitment and retention	Phase 3 investment; workforce development plan; STARS practice; supervision and learning offer across the partnership.
Information is not shared quickly across different systems	Information-sharing protocols; data protection impact assessment and adoption of the single unique identifier when introduced under the 2026 Act.

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Some groups benefit less, or existing disproportionality continues	Equality impact assessment action plan, led by reporting the equality profile of families in Family Help, child protection and care from Q4 2026/27.
National funding changes after the current programme	Annual review and prioritisation; shared partner resourcing; early engagement in the council budget process.
National policy and inspection change, including Ofsted's planned reforms to inspection of local authority children's services	Annual refresh of the strategy and delivery plan; horizon scanning by the Family Help Delivery Group.

d) Equalities impact assessment

An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment is at Appendix B. It covers all protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, together with socio-economic status, carers, community safety, community cohesion and human rights. It concludes that the strategy is expected to have a positive impact for all groups, by making help easier to reach, earlier and less stigmatising, keeping children safely with their families wherever possible and strengthening protection from harm inside and outside the home.

It identifies potential negative impacts, mainly for Black and Mixed heritage children, families with limited English, disabled children and parents, families in poverty or with no recourse to public funds, fathers, women experiencing domestic abuse, LGBTQ+ young people and young adults moving into adulthood, and potential effects on privacy and on staff. None justifies changing the strategy, and each is mitigated through an action plan. The first action is to report the equality profile of the families who receive Family Help, which is not yet done routinely. The assessment will be reviewed each year with the strategy.

e) Workforce

The strategy does not propose any restructure or change to terms and conditions. Chapter 8 of the strategy sets out a workforce development plan for Children's Services and partners, including STARS practice, Family Group Decision Making, anti-racist practice and multi-agency training. Any future workforce change would follow the council's HR policies and have its own equality assessment.

f) External partners

This is a partnership strategy. The police, the integrated care board, health providers, schools, housing, the Hillingdon Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service, Best Start Family Hubs and the voluntary, community and faith sector have helped shape it and have agreed commitments in Chapter 7. The strategy will be presented to the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership for endorsement, and partners will be held to account through the Family Help Delivery Group and the Executive Transformation Group.

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g) Communications

Once approved, the strategy will be published on the Council's website, with parent-friendly, child-friendly and easy-read summaries and versions in community languages on request. It will be launched with partners and staff, and progress will be shared each year through the annual review and 'You said, we did' feedback to families.

h) Digital

The strategy relies on effective information sharing between agencies and on the online Care and Support Directory. A data protection impact assessment will be completed before any new information-sharing system or the single unique identifier for children is introduced.

i) Heathrow Expansion

There are no direct implications. Heathrow is an entry point for unaccompanied and trafficked children, and the strategy's harm outside the home pathway and partnership with the police address this. Any change in population or demand arising from expansion will be considered through the strategy's annual review.

6. Delivering the Cabinet's Priorities 2026-2030

The Council's ambition is to make Hillingdon an even better place to live, work and invest. This report supports the delivery of the following [Cabinet Priorities](#):

1	Being easy to deal with	Y	One front door through the 24-hour Stronger Families Hub, one assessment and one live plan, so families tell their story once, with Family Hubs bringing services together locally and the online Care and Support Directory.
2	Being brilliant at the basics	Y	Working with the police and community safety partners to identify and disrupt exploitation and serious youth violence and respond to children who go missing, so streets and public spaces are safer for children.
3	Putting our residents first	Y	A partnership of the Council, police, health, schools, housing and the voluntary sector that protects vulnerable children, helps families stay safely together and listens to families through the parents group and young people's participation groups.
4	Delivering Hillingdon homes for Hillingdon people	Y	Early housing advice and homelessness prevention for families receiving Family Help, and a lawful, coordinated response to families with no recourse to public funds.

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5	Supporting future generations	Y	Shared outcomes for children's wellbeing, learning and development, including Good Level of Development, school attendance and young people in education, employment or training.
6	Being open for business	Y	Helping parents into training and work through Family Hub finance, benefits and employment support, and helping young people into education, employment and training.

7. Consultation & engagement

The strategy was co-produced between May and October 2026 through:

- the Family Help Delivery Group, meeting from 21 May 2026, with representatives from health, education, SEND, domestic abuse services, early years, the voluntary sector and the participation service;
- a stakeholder event and partner workshops on 15 July 2026 (police, health, housing, the voluntary sector and a participation officer with lived experience) and 8 September 2026 (headteachers, the Virtual School, SEND, Home-Start, CNWL and housing);
- the Families First parents' group, which set out 11 priorities for Family Help;
- written feedback on the first draft from the police, Family Hubs, the SEND Advisory Service, parents and the Director of Children's Services; and
- written feedback on the second draft (October 2026) from The Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, the Hillingdon Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service, Best Start Family Hubs, the SEND Advisory Service and Childcare.

Feedback shaped the final strategy. Parents' priorities are reflected throughout, including telling their story once, clear communication, SEND, early mental health support, domestic abuse, housing, support for separated parents and whole-family working. Partners' feedback clarified the police role in the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team, strengthened the response to harm outside the home, protected partners' duty to refer safeguarding concerns without delay, and updated the domestic abuse and Family Hubs sections. The strategy includes a 'You said, we did' appendix.

Direct engagement with children and young people, and with some seldom-heard groups, has so far been limited. The equality action plan commits to engaging the Children in Care Councils, the Youth Council, Aim High and community groups on child-friendly and parent-friendly versions of the strategy, and through each annual review. No formal public consultation is required because the strategy does not change any service; any future service change will be consulted on separately.

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8. Timetable for implementation

Date	Milestone
October 2026	Cabinet Member decision, followed by the call-in period.
November 2026	Strategy presented to the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership for endorsement; published on the council's website with accessible summaries.
October–December 2026	Partnership commitments put into practice; each partner names a lead through the Family Help Delivery Group.
By December 2026	Baselines and targets agreed for all measures and published in the delivery plan.
January–March 2027	Families First requirements confirmed as fully embedded, including the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team, by March 2027.
Q4 2026/27	First report on the equality profile of families in Family Help, child protection and care.
October 2027	First annual review published and reported to the Cabinet Member; equality impact assessment reviewed.
2029	Full review of the strategy alongside the SEND Reform Plan and the Council Priorities 2026–2030.

List of appendices attached

1. Appendix A – Hillingdon Family Help Strategy 2026–2031
2. Appendix B – Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment

List of Background Papers

NIL.

Family Help Strategy

2026–2031



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Foreword

Foreword from the Cabinet Member for Adults, Children, Families and Education

As Cabinet Member for Adults, Children, Health and Care, I am proud of Hillingdon's commitment to giving every child the best possible start in life. I want every child in our borough to grow up safe, happy, healthy and loved, with the opportunity to learn, thrive and look to the future with confidence. I also know that family life can bring challenges, and that there are times when parents and carers need extra support. When that happens, help should be easy to find, offered early and delivered by people families know and trust.

That is the purpose of this Family Help Strategy. It builds on the locality-based service we introduced in August 2025, bringing targeted early help and children in need services together and strengthening the way the council works with health, education, police, housing, Family Hubs and voluntary and community organisations. Our ambition is a simpler and more joined-up system: one assessment, one live plan and fewer handovers, so families do not have to repeat their story and can receive the right support at the right time and close to home.

Most importantly, this strategy has been shaped with children, young people, parents, carers, practitioners and partners. Families have told us they want clear communication, support for the whole family and a genuine say in the decisions that affect them. Through our STARS practice approach and Family Group Decision Making, we will work alongside families, build on their strengths and involve their wider networks wherever it is safe to do so. Safeguarding will remain at the heart of everything we do, alongside earlier help, stronger relationships and a shared commitment to keeping children safely connected to their families and communities.

I welcome this strategy and the clear commitments it makes through to 2031. Its success will be measured not simply by changes to services, but by the difference children and families experience: children being safer, needs being identified earlier, families feeling heard and supported, and more children growing up in stable, loving homes with strong relationships and opportunities to thrive. I look forward to working with families, communities and our partners to turn this shared ambition into lasting change.

Councillor Susan O'Brien

Cabinet Member for Adults, Children, Families and Education

Foreword from the Director of Children's Social Care

I am proud to lead Children's Social Care in Hillingdon and to see, every day, the care, skill and determination our practitioners and partners bring to their work with children and families. I also know that families do not experience our services through structures or job titles. They experience the quality of the relationship, whether we listen, whether we understand what life is really like for their child and whether the help we offer makes a meaningful difference. That is why this strategy matters to me. During our first year of Family Help, I have seen the benefits of bringing services together around families and reducing unnecessary changes of worker. I have also heard clearly from families and staff that changing structures is only the start. What matters is how consistently we translate that change into thoughtful assessments, honest conversations, timely decisions and practical support.

For me, safeguarding must remain at the heart of everything we do. Helping families earlier should enable us to recognise concerns sooner, understand the child's lived experience and act before difficulties become crises. It must never mean losing sight of risk. Where a child is unsafe, I expect us to share information quickly, bring the right professionals together and take clear and decisive action. I want families to experience us as people who work with them, not as a system that does things to them. Our STARS approach reflects the kind of practice I believe in: compassionate and relational, curious about trauma and identity, ambitious for every child and always grounded in safety. Family Group Decision Making builds on this by giving families and the people who matter to them a genuine opportunity to shape plans and find solutions that can last.

I am equally clear that our workforce needs the right conditions to do this well. Practitioners should feel supported by strong supervision, confident professional challenge and leaders who are visible and willing to remove barriers. No single service can meet the needs of a child or family alone, so I expect all of us across children's services, health, education, police, housing and the voluntary and community sector to take responsibility for the part we play and to resolve differences without allowing delay or drift.

We will keep listening to children, parents, carers, practitioners and our partners and we will be honest about what is working and where we need to do better. Data, audits and performance information are important, but they only tell part of the story. I want us to pay equal attention to whether families feel heard, whether children can see their experiences reflected in their plans and whether our involvement has helped life become safer and more stable.

My commitment is to lead a culture that combines compassion with high expectations: one where people feel able to speak openly, challenge respectfully, learn from mistakes and take pride in good practice. We will use evidence to hold ourselves to account, confront disproportionality and make sure that children and families whose voices are less often heard receive the same quality of help and protection.

This strategy sets the direction, but its success will be determined by what children and families experience in practice. I am personally committed to working alongside our workforce, partners and communities to make that ambition real and to ensuring that, when a family needs us, we respond with humanity, clarity and a relentless focus on the child. **Tehseen Kauser**, Director of Children's Social Care.

Executive summary

Hillingdon's Family Help Strategy sets the partnership's direction from 2026 to 2031. It builds on the locality-based Family Help service introduced in August 2025 and describes how the council, health, education, police, housing, Family Hubs and voluntary, community and faith organisations will provide earlier, coordinated help while maintaining a clear and decisive response when children need protection.

Why change is needed

Families are experiencing increasingly connected needs, including poverty, housing instability, domestic abuse, poor mental health, SEND, school attendance concerns and harm outside the home. Too often, separate pathways have required families to repeat their story, created changes of worker and delayed coordinated action. The strategy responds by creating a simpler whole-system offer built around one assessment, one live plan and the professional best placed to lead.

What families should experience

Families should receive help earlier, closer to home and from people they know and trust. They should understand what professionals are worried about, have a genuine say in decisions and be supported to involve safe family and community networks. Through STARS practice approach and Family Group Decision Making, support will be strengths-based, trauma-informed, aspirational, relational and safety-driven.

What will be different

The strategy strengthens the Stronger Families Hub as the integrated front door, expands locality Family Help teams, embeds Stronger Together and Family Network Support Packages, develops the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team and a single response to harm outside the home, and sets clear commitments for every partner. It also requires interim support when families are waiting for specialist services and expects partners to take the lead practitioner role where they are best placed.

How success will be measured

Success will be measured by the difference children and families experience: children are safer; needs are identified and addressed earlier; children are healthier and engaged in learning; more children grow up in stable, loving homes; and families have stronger relationships and social connections. Performance data will be considered alongside audits, workforce evidence and feedback from children, families and partners. Progress will be reported quarterly and through an annual public review from October 2027.

Delivery and accountability

The Family Help Delivery Group will coordinate implementation and hold named partner leads to account. The Executive Transformation Group will address delivery barriers and resource issues, while the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership will provide strategic oversight and assurance. By March 2027, the partnership will confirm that the single Family Help offer, lead practitioner model, one live plan, Family Group Decision Making, Multi-Agency Child Protection Team and supporting protocols are fully embedded.

Our vision is that every child in Hillingdon grows up safe, happy, healthy, loved, and able to thrive, supported by strong families, connected communities, and help that arrives early and makes a lasting difference.

This vision is achieved through our principles and priorities, the way we work with families, how we measure success, and our accountability and governance arrangements.

1. Introduction

1.1 Why Family Help is needed

This strategy explains how Hillingdon's partnership will provide earlier, more coordinated help for children, young people and families while maintaining a clear safeguarding response when children are at risk. At the heart of this approach is our commitment to listening to children, understanding their lived experiences and ensuring their wishes and feelings are visible in the decisions, assessments and plans that affect them. By working alongside children and their families, building on their strengths and learning from what they tell us, we will shape support that helps children feel heard, safe and able to thrive.

Family Help is part of the national Families First Partnership Programme, introduced in 2025 to make support for children, young people and families easier to access, more connected and more responsive. Its purpose is to ensure families receive the right service, at the right time and at the earliest opportunity, with services working together around the whole family rather than through separate pathways. By listening to children and families, recognising their strengths and offering help early, we can improve children's wellbeing, address difficulties before they escalate and reduce the need for more intensive intervention.

This strategy reflects the updated statutory guidance published in March 2026. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 confirms that Family Help should bring targeted early help and support under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 together into one seamless offer, with fewer handovers, one assessment and one live plan. It also strengthens expectations for multi-agency child protection, anti-discriminatory practice, effective information sharing and coordinated responses to harm outside the home.

The Children's Social Care National Framework 2026 sets four connected outcomes that this strategy is designed to deliver: children, young people and families stay together and receive the help they need; children and young people are safe in and outside their homes; children and young people are supported by their family networks; and children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes. These outcomes are reflected in this strategy's priorities, partnership commitments and measures of impact. Ofsted's inspection framework for local authority children's

services has also been updated to reflect the reforms, reinforcing the importance of evidence that children's lived experiences, wishes and feelings shape assessment, planning and decision-making.

1.2 Statutory and policy framework

Family Help and child protection rest on clear statutory duties. Under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, the council must safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need. Under section 47, it must make enquiries where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. The Children Act 2004 requires relevant partners to cooperate to improve children's wellbeing. The council, West and North London Integrated Care Board and police are the statutory safeguarding partners and share responsibility for local arrangements to safeguard children, while each agency retains its own statutory responsibilities.

The national policy statement *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive* and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 provide the direction and legislative foundation for the next phase of reform. Together, they strengthen the focus on keeping children safely within their families and kinship networks wherever possible; offering Family Group Decision Making before care proceedings; improving information sharing; expanding the role of education and childcare within safeguarding arrangements; establishing Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams; and creating a more integrated, accountable and learning-led system.

Hillingdon has already anticipated and aligned with this direction through locality-based Family Help teams, the continued development of the Stronger Families Multi-Agency Hub as an integrated front door, Stronger Together and Family Group Decision Making, Family Network Support Packages, the developing Multi-Agency Child Protection Team and Lead Child Protection Practitioner arrangements, and a stronger focus on family voice, advocacy, partner collaboration, STARS practice and quality assurance. This strategy brings those developments together within one partnership framework, with shared outcomes, clearer accountability and a commitment to ensuring children and families experience coordinated support rather than separate services.

1.3 Building on our first year of Family Help

This strategy does not start from a blank page. Hillingdon's locality-based Family Help service has been operating since August 2025. From the outset, implementation was guided by a clear framework:

- the national Families First Partnership Programme Guide (2025) and its delivery expectations, and Hillingdon's Families First delivery plan agreed with our safeguarding partners and submitted to the Department for Education in 2025;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children and the Children's Social Care National Framework;
- the principles of our Stronger Families Strategy 2021–2025: help from the right person at the right time, Think Family, and trauma-informed practice;
- our shared practice model (STARS) and the practice standards behind our children's services, judged Outstanding by Ofsted in October 2023.

Decisions on the design and pace of implementation were made through the Executive Transformation Group, which brings together our statutory safeguarding partners each month and is accountable to the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership. Progress has been tracked from the start through the Department for Education's quarterly Families First data returns, our performance dashboards, case audits, and feedback from families, practitioners and partners.

Our approach was to test and learn: launch the service, learn from its first months, and then set the partnership's longer-term direction on the basis of that evidence. From May 2026 the Family Help Delivery Group brought together partners from health, education, the police, housing, the voluntary and community sector and our participation service to co-produce this strategy. They worked through a stakeholder event, workshops in July and September 2026, the Families First parents group, and written feedback from partners.

We are committed to putting children, young people and families at the heart of Family Help, ensuring their voices actively shape how services are designed, commissioned, delivered and reviewed. Through regular consultation, our Families First parents group and young people's participation groups, and by developing parent and young person representation within our Family Help governance, we will work in genuine partnership to continually improve support and outcomes for families across Hillingdon.

1.4 What the first year has taught us

- Families are experiencing more coordinated support, with fewer changes of worker and less need to repeat their story. Early evidence is encouraging: in 2025/26, 66% of the 882 Family Help plans closed through our Family Hubs and Children's Centres achieved their intended outcomes, and case audits found most practice to be good or outstanding.
- Joint working with education, health, housing and community organisations has become stronger, and new pathways have reduced duplication.
- Better use of data has improved our oversight of demand and performance.

- Some families still find support hard to navigate. Long waits for specialist services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and neurodevelopmental assessment leave gaps that partners need to fill together.
- Culture change is the biggest challenge. We are moving from Children's Services as the default lead to shared leadership, where health, education or another partner may be best placed to lead.

This strategy therefore does two things. It sets out in one place the framework that has guided Family Help so far, and it sets the partnership's direction to 2031, including what each partner will do differently (Chapter 7) and how we will know it is working (Chapter 6). It replaces the Stronger Families Strategy 2021–2025.

1.5 Parental involvement and engagement

Children, young people, parents and carers are central to the success of Family Help. Their experiences, feedback and involvement help shape both the support provided to individual families and the ongoing development of services across the partnership.

Families are experts in their own lives. Children, young people, parents and carers will be actively involved in decisions, with concerns, expectations and next steps explained clearly. Plans will be developed with families, rather than for them.

Our Stronger Together approach identifies safe support within a family's wider network. Where a child cannot remain at home, relatives or friends may be able to provide a familiar, loving home and preserve important relationships, culture and community connections.

Children, young people and parents have shaped the Family Help vision, assessment, feedback forms, the Stronger Together team name and the High Five commitments. Ongoing participation through the Families First parents group and the Talkers, Step Up and Stepping Out groups will continue to influence service design, delivery and review.

1.6 Supporting the Council Priorities 2026–2030

The Council Priorities 2026–2030, adopted in September 2026, set the council's ambition 'to make Hillingdon an even better place to live, work and invest'. Family Help contributes to all six priorities:

Council priority	How this strategy contributes
Putting our residents first: supporting residents to live healthy and independent lives, leading strong partnerships to improve outcomes and standing up for communities.	Family Help is led by a partnership of the council, police, health, schools, housing and the voluntary sector (Chapter 7). It protects vulnerable children, helps families stay safely together, and listens to families through the Families First parents group and young people's participation groups.
Future generations: services and facilities which support the learning and wellbeing of future generations, so they reach their potential.	Outcomes 3 and 4 (happy and healthy; learning, engaged and thriving). Measures include Good Level of Development, school attendance and young people in education, employment or training, with the Youth Offer, AXIS and schools as partners.
Easy to deal with: making services easier to access and use, by bringing them together, enhancing digital tools and responding to residents quickly and clearly.	One front door through the 24-hour Stronger Families Hub, one assessment and one live plan so families tell their story once, Family Hubs bringing services together locally, and the Care and Support Directory online.
Hillingdon homes for Hillingdon people: creating and improving homes that reflect local need.	Early housing advice and homelessness prevention for families receiving Family Help, and a lawful, coordinated response to families with no recourse to public funds.
Brilliant at the basics: clean, safe streets and green spaces, and tough enforcement action.	Working with the police and community safety partners to identify and disrupt exploitation and serious youth violence, and to respond to children who go missing, so streets and public spaces are safer for children.
Open for business: creating opportunities for residents and businesses to thrive.	Helping parents into training and work through Family Hub finance, benefits and employment support, and helping young people into education, employment and training.

2. Understanding Hillingdon's Children, Families and Communities

2.1 Demographic Profile and Local Context

Hillingdon is the second-largest borough in London, with a population of approximately 329,185 residents and a diverse, growing community. According to the 2021 Census, there are 24,371 children aged 0-5 years living in the borough, representing around 8% of the population. The borough is characterised by a predominantly working-age population and is one of London's most ethnically diverse areas, with 48.2% of residents identifying as White, 33.3% as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh, 7.8% as Black, Black British or Black Welsh, 4.4% as mixed or multiple ethnic groups, and 6.3% from other ethnic backgrounds. This diversity is a significant strength and requires services that are culturally responsive, accessible and inclusive.

Hillingdon also experiences high levels of population mobility, influenced in part by its proximity to Heathrow Airport, the UK's primary international gateway. This transient population can present challenges in maintaining continuity of care and ensuring that children and families remain connected to early years services and support.

While Hillingdon performs broadly in line with the London average across measures of poverty, socioeconomic challenges remain. The borough ranks 26th out of 31 London boroughs for the proportion of jobs that are low paid, highlighting the financial pressures experienced by many families. These economic factors influence outcomes across education, health and wellbeing and are reflected in patterns of demand for children's services.

The borough is also one of the most linguistically diverse in London, with more than 107 languages spoken and 22.1% of families reporting that a language other than English is spoken at home. This rich cultural diversity is a significant strength for local communities and highlights the importance of delivering inclusive, culturally responsive and accessible services.

Poverty remains a key factor affecting children's development, health and wellbeing. Hillingdon is ranked among the 36% most deprived local authority areas nationally, and around one in five children live in low-income households. Ongoing cost-of-living pressures continue to increase financial hardship for many families. Homelessness also remains a significant concern, with 440 homeless households (32.4% of all households in temporary accommodation) including dependent children during 2025.

2.2 Emerging need and demand

Educational outcomes indicate that some children and young people experience significant disadvantage. At the end of Reception in 2024/25, 58.1% of children eligible for free school meals achieved a Good Level of Development, compared with 71.2% of all children; the Best Start in Life Strategy aims to raise this to 61.3% by 2027/28. Similarly, disadvantaged pupils at Key Stage 2 have lower attainment levels, with 49% achieving the expected standard, below the London average. Attendance is also a key area of concern, with higher rates of both authorised and unauthorised absence in primary schools, alongside elevated levels of persistent absence across both primary and secondary education. Secondary school exclusions are also slightly higher than the London average, suggesting that a proportion of children face barriers to sustained engagement in education.

Financial hardship is particularly evident among children aged 5 to 10, where the highest levels of absolute and relative low income are recorded, affecting 3,804 children of primary school age. Hillingdon also reports higher numbers of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in nursery and primary settings, indicating increasing levels of identified special educational need. In addition, the borough has higher levels of 16 and 17-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to London averages, for both males and females, with the inherent implications for those young people in regard to future opportunities and social mobility.

Special educational needs are an increasingly important part of the picture. The number of children with an EHCP rose by an average of around 11.6% a year over five years, to 3,503 in 2023/24, and speech, language and communication needs are the most common primary need among pupils with SEND (9,253 pupils, 32%, in 2024/25). More children are also being identified as needing SEN Support in school. The SEND Reform Plan 2026–2029 aims to increase SEN Support from around 12% to 14.5% of pupils by 2029, so that more needs are met early without statutory processes. For Family Help, SEND is often one of several connected needs in a family, alongside parental mental health, housing, poverty and school attendance.

Health data further illustrates the challenges faced by children, young people and families. Rates of low-birth-weight babies are higher than the London average, and hospital admissions among children aged 0 to 9 are elevated. Admissions resulting from unintentional and deliberate injuries are also higher than London averages for both children and young adults, highlighting the importance of preventative and early support services.

Mental health continues to be an area of concern. Hospital admissions resulting from self-harm among children aged 10 to 14 are significantly higher than the London average, whilst admissions for self-harm among young adults aged 20 to 24 also exceed regional comparators. These indicators point to ongoing pressures on

emotional wellbeing and the importance of strengthening early support, resilience-building and access to mental health services that support emotional wellbeing.

Adult health outcomes also have implications for children and families. Admissions related to alcohol-related conditions are higher than the London average, with particularly high rates among males. Substance misuse and adult mental health difficulties can have a significant impact on family functioning, parental capacity and children's outcomes, reinforcing the importance of a whole-family approach to support.

Community safety data also demonstrates areas of need, with rates of anti-social behaviour exceeding the England average. Such factors can contribute to community vulnerability and influence children's sense of safety and wellbeing.

Children's Social Care data highlights the nature of demand within the borough. As of 30 April 2026, the most common reasons for Family Help involvement were abuse or neglect (53%), family acute stress (16%), and child disability or illness (10%). Similarly, within Child Protection Plans, neglect was the predominant category, accounting for 51% of plans, followed by emotional abuse (in the main as a result of being impacted by domestic abuse) at 43% and physical abuse at 6%. These trends underline the importance of early identification of risk, strengthening family resilience, and delivering coordinated, multi-agency interventions that address the underlying causes of harm and vulnerability.

2.3 Equality and disproportionality

Hillingdon's diversity is a strength, but outcomes and experiences are not equal. Children from Black and Mixed heritage backgrounds are over-represented at the sharper end of the system. In 2023/24, Black children accounted for 27% of police stop and searches of children, compared with 13% of the population, and the over-representation of Black and Mixed heritage boys in custody remains a priority in the Youth Justice Strategy 2024–2029. We will report the ethnicity profile of children receiving Family Help, on child protection plans and in care, compared with the child population, in the first annual review. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 expects anti-racist, bias-aware practice at every level. This strategy commits partners to using data to identify and address disproportionality (see Chapters 10 and appendix 7).

2.4 Increasing Complexity of Need

Many families present with multiple, interconnected needs that cannot be understood in isolation. Alongside the challenges outlined above, Hillingdon is seeing increasing complexity in the circumstances affecting some children and families. These include immigration-related restrictions, extra-familial harm, exploitation, youth violence, mental health needs, and the cumulative impact of poverty, housing instability and parental vulnerabilities. Family Help must therefore provide coordinated, whole-family responses that are flexible, preventative and responsive to risk.

Responding to families with No Recourse to Public Funds

Some families in Hillingdon may be subject to immigration conditions that restrict access to public funds. This can increase financial hardship, housing instability and barriers to accessing support, particularly where families are newly arrived, experiencing changes in immigration status, or unsure about their rights and responsibilities. Hillingdon's Family Help approach will ensure these families receive a timely, lawful and compassionate response that places children's safety, wellbeing and lived experience at the centre of assessment and planning.

The August 2026 cross-government NRPF guidance provides a single reference point for local authorities, clarifying how immigration status, entitlements, statutory duties, discretionary powers and legal restrictions should be considered when supporting people with no recourse to public funds. For Children's Services, this means decisions must clearly distinguish between what the council is legally required to do, what it has discretion to do, and where immigration-related restrictions apply. Case-specific legal advice should be sought where required.

Our response will be to:

- Identify families with no recourse to public funds early, at the Stronger Families Hub and through partners;
- Complete timely, lawful assessments of children's needs under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, seeking legal advice where needed;
- Work with Housing, the voluntary sector and immigration advice services so families receive accurate advice and are not left destitute;
- Make sure support plans address children's safety, wellbeing and education, as well as the family's immediate needs.

This approach supports the wider aims of Family Help by ensuring that families affected by NRPF are not left to navigate complex systems alone. The focus will be on early identification, lawful decision-making, coordinated partnership support and practical planning that helps children remain safe, connected and supported within their families and communities wherever this is in their best interests.

Extra-Familial Harm

Alongside neglect and domestic abuse, Hillingdon continues to respond to increasing concerns relating to extra-familial harm, including child exploitation, youth violence, serious violence and missing children. These issues require strong partnership responses that combine safeguarding, contextual safeguarding approaches and, where appropriate, specialist intervention through the Adolescent Service and Multi-Agency Child Protection Team.

Taken together, the demographic, socioeconomic, educational and health profile of Hillingdon demonstrates the need for a strong, preventative and family-centred support system. Alongside increasing complexity of need, including poverty, SEND, mental health challenges, extra-familial harm and immigration-related vulnerabilities, the data highlights the importance of coordinated early intervention and whole-family support. These priorities form the foundation of this strategy and inform the borough's approach to delivering Family Help and wider support services.

3. Hillingdon's Family Help Model and Approach

The demographic profile, emerging needs and increasing complexity outlined in Chapter 2 demonstrate the importance of a coordinated, whole-family approach to support. Family Help is Hillingdon's response to these challenges, bringing services and partners together around one assessment, one plan and one consistent relationship with families.

Hillingdon launched its locality-based Family Help service on 27 August 2025, bringing Targeted Early Help, Child in Need and Child Protection practitioners into 11 teams across the North, South West and South East. Following approval of the Phase 3 business case in July 2026, three additional teams are being recruited, taking the service to 14 teams. Additional investment also strengthens the Stronger Families Hub, Lead Child Protection Practitioner capacity and support for children with disabilities.

The next phase is a change in practice as well as structure. Partners will identify need earlier, involve families in decisions, use existing trusted relationships and agree who is best placed to lead. Family Help will become a shared partnership responsibility rather than a service to which other agencies simply refer.

Hillingdon benefits from a strong universal and preventative offer, supported by four Best Start in Life Family Hubs located in Uxbridge, South Ruislip, West Drayton and Hayes, alongside a wide range of outreach and community-based provision. While most families access support through universal services, a smaller number require additional targeted support. Strong connections between Family Hubs, schools, health services, community organisations and Family Help teams have been developed and we continue to foster this to ensure families receive support as early as possible and can access help before concerns escalate.

Our Family Help model is designed to be accessible within local communities, particularly for children, young people and families who may not traditionally engage with services. We recognise that some families face barriers to seeking support and that some voices are not always heard. We are committed to listening to families, understanding their experiences and using their feedback to shape and improve services. We also recognise the important role that faith groups, voluntary organisations and community networks play as trusted sources of support and will continue to strengthen our partnerships with these organisations to extend our reach into local communities.

The Stronger Families Multi-Agency Hub has been the single point of access to Children's Social Care in Hillingdon since 2021. Through the Families First transformation programme, it has evolved from a referral pathway into an enhanced integrated front door that provides advice, consultation, screening, information sharing and proportionate decision-making. This ensures that children and families are connected to the right support at the earliest opportunity.

The Stronger Families Hub operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year as the single point of access to Children's Social Care. It provides advice, consultation, screening, information sharing and proportionate decision-making, including out of hours. The next phase will strengthen it as a multi-agency gateway linked to locality teams, Family Hubs, the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team and partner services.

Working together is central to the effectiveness of the Stronger Families Multi-Agency Hub. Professionals from education, health, children's services, police, housing, early years and the voluntary and community sector work together to understand family needs, share information safely and coordinate support. This collaborative approach enables agencies to identify concerns earlier, respond more effectively and reduce the likelihood of children and families experiencing crises that require more intensive intervention.

Where children face harm outside the home including exploitation, serious violence, online harm or going missing Family Help works with the specialist Adolescent Service, AXIS, police, health, education, youth justice and the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team. The response considers the child's relationships, peer groups, schools, neighbourhoods, public spaces and online contexts, not only risk within the family home.

Some children are harmed not at home but in their communities, in peer groups, online and in public spaces. Heathrow also makes Hillingdon a significant entry point for children who are trafficked. In 2025/26 our AXIS service identified more than 800 children as potentially vulnerable to exploitation, serious youth violence or going missing, and 78% of referrals were for children not previously known to the service. AXIS gave intensive one-to-one support to 143 children and ran contextual safeguarding sessions for 518 children in 18 schools. Through AXIS, Project Turnaround and the Engage programme in police custody suites, many of these children are reached early and on a voluntary basis, as part of our Family Help offer.

Our place-based Making Hayes Safe project shows what partnership working in one neighbourhood can achieve. It has engaged more than 2,500 children, families and community members, violent offences involving children in Hayes have fallen by 16% since April 2025, and the project won first place at the National Crimebeat Awards 2026. We are seeking funding to extend the approach to other high-risk areas, alongside the single Risk Outside the Home pathway being designed through the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team.

Children who go missing are at risk of harm, and going missing can be a sign of exploitation or of harm at home. Under the Missing Children Protocol, every child is offered a return home conversation within 72 hours of coming back. Information from these conversations is shared with the police, AXIS and the Adolescent Service so that patterns, places and people linked to harm can be identified and disrupted. Where a child is experiencing, or likely to experience, significant harm outside the home, they receive a child protection response through the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team, as Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 requires, with parents and carers treated as protective partners wherever it is safe.

3.1 Locality-Based Support

Hillingdon adopts a locality-based approach to ensure that families can access support within their local neighbourhoods with Family Support Teams as a community asset. The borough is divided into three areas; North, South East and South West. These are the same three localities used by the SEND Reform Plan's school clusters (North 1 and 2, South West 1 and 2, South East 1 and 2), so partners can plan around the same local footprint, with Family Hubs and Young Peoples Centres acting as further community assets and access points for services.

These centres bring together a wide range of professionals who work collaboratively to promote child development, learning, health and family wellbeing. Services include Hillingdon Youth Offer, midwifery, health visiting, SEND support, youth services and access to wider community resources. Currently, Hillingdon has four Family Hubs and two Young Peoples Centres alongside nine other network sites distributed across the borough. Additional outreach support is planned from 2027 onwards, further strengthening local access to integrated support.

Services are designed in response to community needs, informed by local intelligence, engagement and demographic data. Provision is delivered through a combination of community-based and digital approaches, including parks, libraries, toddler groups, pop-up events and online platforms, making support more accessible and responsive to families' circumstances.

Locality-based services provide the structure through which support is delivered. To ensure families experience a consistent approach regardless of the service they access, all practitioners and partner agencies work within a shared practice framework.

3.2 Our shared practice model and way of working



The STARS (Strengths-based, Trauma-informed, Aspirational, Relational, Safety-driven) Practice Model is the foundation of Hillingdon's Family Help approach, providing a consistent, borough-wide framework for practice across services and partner agencies. It establishes a shared culture and methodology that empowers practitioners to harness family strengths, respond effectively to the impact of trauma, and maintain high aspirations for children and families. By promoting relationship-based practice and collaborative decision-making, STARS ensures that safeguarding, wellbeing and sustainable outcomes remain central to assessment, planning and intervention, enabling families to achieve lasting change. In everyday terms, this means our workforce is trauma-informed, trauma-responsive and relationship-based. This is the same practice language used in our Care Strategy and Best Start in Life Strategy, so families experience a consistent approach whichever service they meet.

Our High Five Children's Services Commitments

The High Five Children's Services Commitments set out, on one page, what all of Hillingdon's Children's Services are working towards: five priorities, five desired outcomes for children, five values and behaviours, five ways to achieve them, and five ways to measure success. This strategy is how the High Five is delivered for Family Help. The table below shows how they connect, and the full commitments are in Appendix 8.

High 5 commitment	How this strategy delivers it
Priority 1: Keeping children safe	Principle 1; the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (1.7); our response to harm outside the home (1.2, 2.3)
Priority 2: Promoting a best start and a bright future	Best Start Family Hubs and New Beginnings (1.6); outcome 4, learning, engaged and thriving
Priority 3: Providing the right support, at the right time, in the right place	Principle 2; priorities 1, 2 and 4; the Stronger Families Hub; one assessment and one plan, so families tell their story once.
Priority 4: Supporting families to stay together	Principle 3, Family Group Decision Making (1.5); priority 6; Family Network Support Packages.
Priority 5: Enabling our skilled and supported workforce	Principle 6; workforce development (Chapter 8)
Our five desired outcomes	Family Help outcomes 1 to 5 use the same five outcomes. Outcome 2 is worded 'needs identified early and addressed', as agreed with partners. Family Help adds a sixth: positive relationships and social connections (Chapter 5).
Our five values, and ways to achieve them	The STARS practice approach, Family Group Decision Making, equality and anti-racist practice, and the partnership commitments in Chapter 7.
Our five ways to measure success	Family voice, early help, education and safeguarding measures, data and quality assurance (Chapter 6)

3.3 Parental involvement and engagement

Families are experts in their own lives. We will involve children, parents and carers in decisions, explain concerns and expectations clearly, and build plans with them rather than around them.

Our Stronger Together approach identifies safe support within a family's wider network. Where a child cannot remain at home, relatives or friends may be able to provide a familiar, loving home and preserve important relationships, culture and community connections.

Children, young people and parents have shaped the Family Help vision, assessment, feedback forms, the Stronger Together team name and the High Five commitments. Ongoing participation through the Families First parents group and the Talkers, Step Up and Stepping Out groups will continue to influence service design, delivery and review.

3.4 Family Group Decision Making

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is Hillingdon's family-led approach to assessment and planning. Delivered through the Stronger Together team, it brings children, parents, carers and safe family or trusted networks together to develop practical plans in response to concerns about a child's wellbeing or safety. It can be used from first contact and early help through child protection, pre-proceedings and reunification.

The Stronger Together team empowers families and their wider networks to play a leading role in decisions about their children's safety, wellbeing and long-term stability. Led by a dedicated manager, Stronger Together Key Workers prepare children, young people, parents, extended family members and other significant people to take part meaningfully. They ensure the child's voice is heard, help the family identify its strengths and sources of support, and make sure professional concerns and safeguarding expectations are clearly understood. Families are then supported to develop their own safe, practical and sustainable plan. This strengthens ownership of the decisions and arrangements made for the child, while ensuring the plan is checked against identified safeguarding requirements and reviewed over time to confirm that it continues to meet the child's needs.

The Stronger Together team went live in August 2026, bringing Hillingdon's Family Group Conference service in-house in place of the previous external contract. This has enabled Family Group Decision Making to be offered earlier, more consistently and as an integral part of Family Help practice. Early evidence is encouraging: none of the 23 children on child protection plans whose families participated subsequently progressed to pre-proceedings or care proceedings. While this is an early cohort and will continue to be monitored, it provides a positive indication of the contribution that well-prepared, family-led planning can make to strengthening safety, mobilising family networks and helping children remain safely connected to those who matter to them.

Key features of FGDM and Stronger Together:

- Recognising families as experts in their own lives and central partners in planning.
- Mobilising family, friends and wider networks to strengthen safe and sustainable support.
- Enabling families to develop safe, practical and family-led plans wherever this is appropriate.
- Ensuring children's voices, wishes and feelings are central to preparation, decision-making and planning.
- Providing impartial facilitation through Stronger Together Key Workers who are independent of statutory casework teams.
- Increasing family ownership of plans so change is understood, agreed and more likely to last.

Family Group Decision Making:

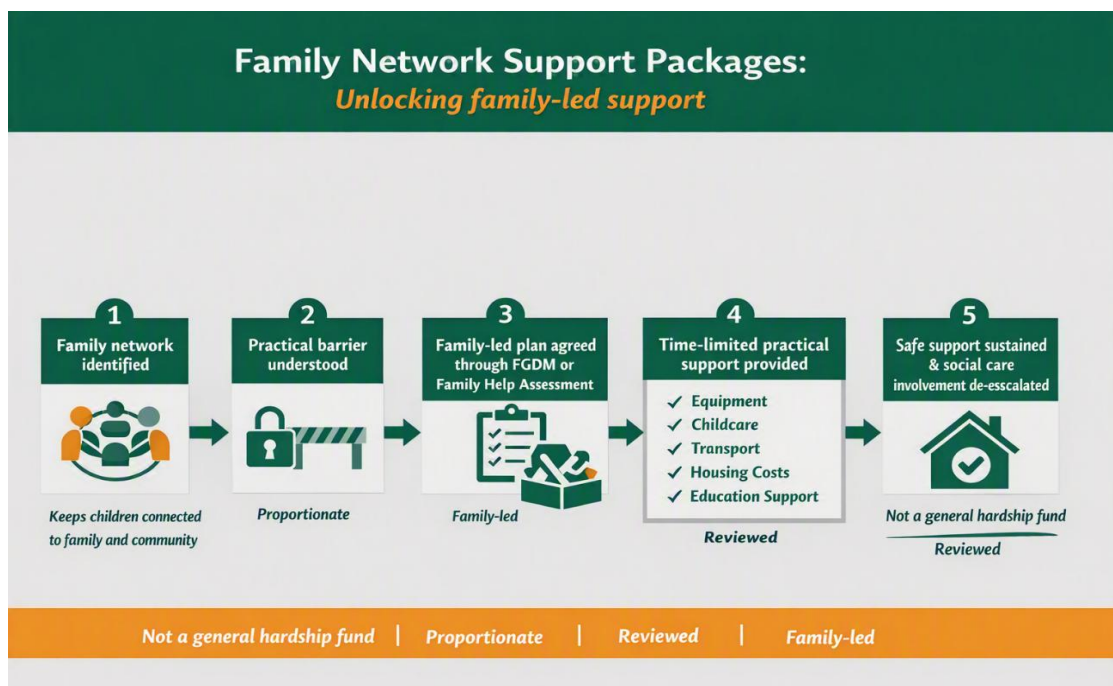
Family-led planning for safer outcomes



- Reducing escalation by identifying strengths, risks and solutions earlier with the family network.
- Supporting permanence by keeping children connected to safe, familiar relationships whenever possible.

Family Network Support Packages (FNSP)

Family Network Support Packages provide targeted, proportionate and normally time-limited practical or financial help where a safe family or trusted network can support a child but faces a specific barrier. Support may address equipment, childcare, transport, housing-related costs or education needs. Packages must be linked to an FGDM plan or Family Help Assessment and Plan, reviewed for impact and used to sustain safe family-led arrangements; they are not a general hardship fund or long-term income replacement.



3.5 Family Help Assessments and plans

Families in Hillingdon are experiencing increasingly complex and interrelated needs. High levels of neglect, rising demand on safeguarding services, educational disadvantage, health inequalities, financial hardship and poverty, increasing numbers of children being identified as requiring SEN Support in school, population mobility linked to Heathrow, and growing adolescent risk and extra-familial harm all point to the need for a more coordinated Family Help Service response.

These challenges rarely sit within a single agency, service or issue. A child may be affected by parental mental health, domestic abuse, poverty, housing instability, missed education, unmet health needs or risks outside the home. Families therefore need support that understands the whole picture, responds at the earliest opportunity and brings the right professionals together around one shared plan.

Family Help Assessments and Plans turn this understanding into clear, coordinated support. The assessment starts with the child's lived experience and brings together the family's strengths, worries, needs and risks. It also considers the wider factors affecting family life, including health, education, housing, poverty, parental wellbeing and community safety, so that support responds to the whole family rather than to individual issues in isolation.

The resulting plan sets out what needs to change, who will do what, how the child, family and their wider network will be involved, and when progress will be reviewed. This makes responsibilities clear, enables progress to be seen and ensures support is purposeful, timely and focused on improving outcomes for the child and meeting the whole family's needs.

Family Group Decision Making strengthens this approach by bringing the family network into assessment and planning early. Professionals provide clear information about concerns, safeguarding requirements and available support, while families and their networks are supported to develop safe, practical and realistic solutions and to lead decision-making wherever it is safe and appropriate. Together, the assessment, one shared plan and family-led decision-making provide a coherent response that reduces duplication, supports earlier help and keeps children safely connected to family, culture and community wherever possible.

4. An integrated network of support for families

Family Help does not operate in isolation. It sits within a wider network of universal, targeted and specialist services across Hillingdon, all working together to support children, young people and families as early as possible, building on strengths and responding to needs before they escalate.

4.1 Continuum of need (Range of support)

The continuum of need helps practitioners, partners and families understand how support should respond flexibly as needs change. In Hillingdon, universal services such as schools, GPs, health visiting, school nursing, libraries, Best Start Family Hubs and outreach as well as the Families' Information Service provide information, advice and support; for most families.

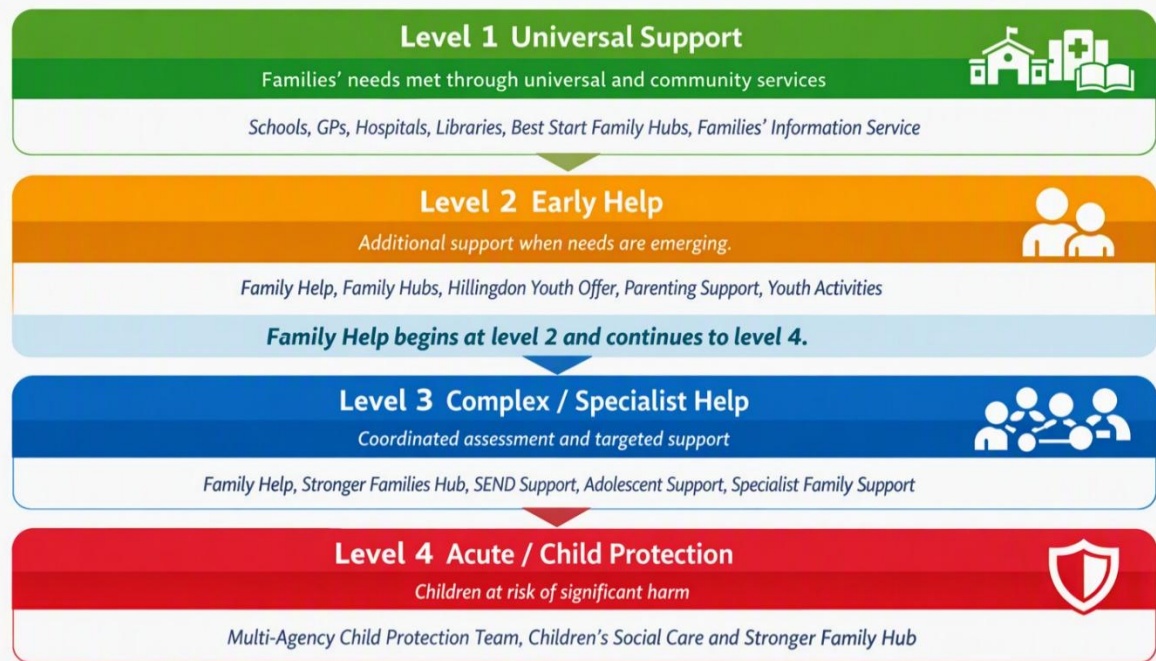
When additional needs emerge, the Stronger Families Hub, Family Help, Family Hub Service, SEND support, the Hillingdon Youth Offer and parenting support can provide more coordinated earlier help with the families existing support network. Where needs become more complex, coordinated assessment and targeted support may include Family Help, adolescent support and specialist family support. Where a child is at risk of significant harm, the response is led through statutory safeguarding arrangements apply including the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team, Lead Child Protection Practitioners, staff across Children's Social Care and the wider professional network as a shared responsibility to support and intervene when needed.

In Hillingdon, we use the London Safeguarding Children Partnership Continuum of Need to help us understand the different levels of support that children and families may need. This framework helps professionals identify concerns early and make sure families receive the right help at the right time.

The continuum shows a range of support options, from universal services available to all families, through to more specialist services where there are concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing. Any support provided is tailored to the needs of the child and family and is intended to be proportionate to the concerns identified. Family Help begins at level 2 and continues to level 4.

As part of the Families First reforms, Hillingdon has refreshed its threshold guidance, assessment protocol and continuum of need arrangements so practitioners and families have a clear, shared understanding of how support moves flexibly across universal help, Family Help, Child in Need and child protection. This includes the notion and function of enhanced screening as a core element of information sharing and evidenced based decision making in the Stronger Families Hub.

Hillingdon Continuum of Need: range of support



4.2 Early Help offer

Alongside Family Help, Hillingdon delivers a broader Early support offer that strengthens prevention, promotes child safety and ensures children, young people and families can access the right support at the right time, before needs escalate. As shown in the Continuum of need visual, there are multiple services delivering early support within each continuum of need before reaching acute/Child protection.

The Early Help offer can be found through the **Hillingdon's Care and Support Directory**, this is a key digital gateway for Family Help, enabling families, practitioners and partners to find local services, support, groups and activities in one place. It provides easy access to information on Family Hubs and Children's Centres, early years and childcare, health and wellbeing, education, employment, SEND support, Healthy Start and young people's services. Used alongside professional conversations and assessments, it helps families access the right support sooner, promotes self-service, and supports early intervention before needs escalate.

Below are some examples of the support offer, please note this is not exhaustive.

➤ Family hubs

Family Hubs provide a welcoming and accessible front door for families to access information, advice and support, with a particular focus on giving children the best start in life. They bring together services for families with children and young people aged 0–19 (up to 25 for those with SEND), ensuring support is coordinated, joined up and available at the earliest opportunity.

Through Family Hub sites, outreach and community partnerships, families can access parenting support, early years services, child development activities, family advice and connections to specialist support.

Family Hubs are where many families first find help. Our four Family Hubs and nine Children's Centres, with outreach in community venues such as toddler groups, places of worship and libraries, engaged 11,974 families through 72,847 attendances in 2025/26. Almost half of attendances (48%) were from priority-need families, although they make up 34% of registrations, which shows the service is reaching those who need it most.

In the October 2025 survey, parents and carers rated the service 4.9 out of 5, and every respondent would recommend it. Parents shape the offer through the Family Hub Parent Group, and in its first year the Family Hub Network training reached 353 practitioners, a third of them from health, education and community organisations. Under the Best Start in Life Strategy and the SEND Reform Plan, Family Hubs will become the main front door for early support, including for children with SEND, with SEND expertise in every hub and school locality clusters aligned to them. Family Help teams work alongside Family Hubs in each locality, so families can move between universal, early and more targeted help without starting again.

➤ **Housing advice and support**

Housing pressures affect many families: in 2025, 440 homeless households included dependent children. Housing Services are part of the Family Help Delivery Group, and families receiving Family Help will be offered early housing advice and homelessness prevention support.

➤ **Hillingdon Youth Offer**

Hillingdon's Youth Offer is integral to the borough's Family Help system, providing universal and targeted support for children and young people aged 8 to 19, and up to 24 for those with special educational needs and disabilities. Through locality-based provision, detached outreach, mentoring, accredited activities and specialist interventions, the service supports early identification of need, builds trusted relationships and enables timely access to help. Partnership with community and voluntary organisations strengthens prevention, promotes resilience and supports children and young people to remain safe, connected and engaged within their communities.

➤ **New Beginnings**

Alongside our Family Help service, we launched the New Beginnings service in September 2025. New Beginnings is Hillingdon's specialist trauma-informed support service for expectant and potential parents, working with parents who require enhanced support due to previous adversity, complex social care histories, or heightened vulnerability. The purpose of New Beginnings is to offer early, compassionate support, build resilience, and reduce the risk of repeat care proceedings by offering tailored support that promotes maternal wellbeing, strengthens parenting capacity, and fosters safe, nurturing environments for children.

➤ **Adolescent Service**

The Adolescent Service provides a specialist response for young people experiencing or at risk of extra-familial harm, including child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, youth violence, serious youth violence, peer-on-peer harm, contextual safeguarding concerns, and children who go missing from home or care. The service works closely with Family Help, the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team, Police, Health, Education and community partners to identify risk, reduce harm and build safety around young people within their families, peer groups, schools and communities. AXIS is a core part of this offer. It identifies children at risk of exploitation and serious youth violence at the earliest opportunity and works with them on a voluntary basis.

➤ **Youth Justice Service**

Hillingdon Youth Justice Service is an integral part of the borough's Family Help, safeguarding and adolescent services system. It works with children and families at the earliest opportunity to prevent offending and reoffending, reduce vulnerability and support sustainable positive change.

The service adopts a child-first, whole-family approach recognising that children's outcomes are shaped by their relationships, communication and developmental needs, education, health and wider circumstances. Working through locality-based Family Help arrangements, practitioners coordinate strengths-based support for children, parents and carers including parenting programmes, whole-family interventions and specialist therapeutic provision.

Supporting victims and repairing harm are central to this approach. Restorative practice is embedded across assessment, planning and decision-making, ensuring that victims' views are heard and that interventions are safe, accessible and meaningful. Health, speech and language, and neurodevelopmental needs are considered so that children can understand, engage with and benefit from support.

The Youth Justice Strategic Partnership Board provides multi-agency leadership, oversight and accountability, bringing partners together to address barriers, scrutinise impact and drive continuous improvement. Through this integrated approach, Hillingdon will strengthen families, support victims, reduce offending and enable children to remain safe, connected and positively engaged within their families and communities.

This connectivity enables the partnership to mobilise resources, attention and delivery against our shared ambitions particularly our five core priorities set out in the Hillingdon Youth Justice Five-Year Strategic Plan 2024-2029 (refer to figure 1 below). It ensures that youth justice is not operating in isolation but as part of a coordinated system response to vulnerability, exploitation and harm.

Figure 1 Hillingdon Youth Justice 5 core priorities set out in the 5-year strategic plan 2024 -2029



➤ Domestic abuse support

Domestic abuse affects many of the families we support. It is the main reason for child protection plans under emotional abuse, which make up 43% of plans. The Hillingdon Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service (HDAAS) supports adult victims and works alongside Family Help. An Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) is co-located in the Stronger Families Hub, and an HDAAS duty worker is available to social workers from Monday to Friday for case discussion, advice and guidance. Following the Joint Targeted Area Inspection of the multi-agency response to domestic abuse in

July 2025, the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership is delivering an improvement programme focused on unborn babies and children aged 0 to 7, including improvements to MARAC and multi-agency audits. Family Help practitioners are trained in the Family Help Domestic Abuse Practice Checklist and Guidance, so that children are recognised as victims in their own right and practitioners work safely with both the adult at risk and the person causing harm.

➤ **Emotional wellbeing and mental health**

Parents told us early mental health support, for young people and for parents, is one of their top priorities. Family Help works with CAMHS, Mental Health Support Teams in schools, Kooth, P3, perinatal mental health services and adult mental health services so that emotional wellbeing is part of every Family Help plan. Where a child or parent is waiting for a specialist service, partners will agree interim support so that families are not left without help while they wait.

➤ **Children with Disabilities Service**

The Children with Disabilities service has been aligned with the Family Help model, so families of disabled children get earlier help without unnecessary hand-offs. Key workers and Positive Behaviour Support workers give practical help at an earlier stage, short breaks have been recommissioned to reach more families, and a Designated Social Care Officer, in post since October 2025, links social care, education and health for children with SEND.

4.3 Multi-Agency Child Protection Team

Earlier help must sit alongside a timely and authoritative response when a child may be at risk of significant harm. Hillingdon is therefore embedding a Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) that brings Children's Social Care, police, health and education together to strengthen risk identification and assessment, information sharing, strategy discussions, coordinated intervention and protective action. Individual agencies will retain their statutory responsibilities, while working through one joined-up safeguarding response with children and families.

An important development within the MACPT is the creation of a single Risk Outside the Home (ROTH) pathway for children experiencing, or at risk of, extra-familial harm. This includes exploitation, serious youth violence, peer-related harm, risks in schools, neighbourhoods and public spaces, online harm and children who go missing. The pathway will provide consistent thresholds and a coordinated route for identification, assessment, planning and intervention, with clear professional accountability across the partnership.

Each child who requires a coordinated response will have a multi-agency ROTH Pathway Plan. The plan will be grounded in the child's lived experience and will bring together their strengths, needs, relationships and protective factors, alongside risks within the wider contexts in which harm may occur. Children's views, wishes and feelings will be actively sought, clearly recorded and used to shape safety planning and decision-making. Parents and carers will be treated as protective partners wherever it is safe and appropriate, recognising that they may have limited influence over the places, peer groups and online environments where harm occurs.

ROTH Pathway Plans will provide one clear multi-agency plan, setting out:

- the identified risks, strengths, protective factors and outcomes sought with the child;
- the actions required to safeguard and support the child, including prevention, disruption and recovery activity;
- the agencies and practitioners responsible for each action and how they will work with the child, family and trusted network;
- measures to address harmful locations, peer groups, networks, schools, neighbourhoods, public spaces and online contexts;
- how intelligence and information will be shared to identify patterns of harm and coordinate action; and
- clear review, escalation and step-down arrangements, including how progress and impact will be assessed.

The MACPT will connect the individual child's plan with wider contextual safeguarding activity. Multi-agency ROTH arrangements, including the Multi-Agency Risk Outside the Home group and High Risk Panel, will provide operational and strategic oversight, identify patterns across children, places and networks, coordinate disruption activity and escalate barriers to effective safeguarding. Clear links will be maintained with the Adolescent Service, AXIS, education, community safety, health, police, youth justice and wider family support services.

Working alongside the Family Help Service, the MACPT will support timely safeguarding decisions, purposeful information sharing and coordinated intervention. Lead Child Protection Practitioners will provide specialist expertise and leadership, while the Family Help Lead Practitioner maintains the relationship with the family and coordinates ongoing support. This ensures that the specialist child protection and ROTH response is integrated with, rather than separate from, the child's wider Family Help plan.

The role of the police in the MACPT

Police officers contribute information, risk assessment and safeguarding decisions as equal partners. Criminal investigation remains a separate police responsibility. Where a child protection enquiry and criminal investigation run together, agencies will agree roles, information sharing and communication with the family through the strategy discussion.

Families remain rooted in Family Help throughout. The Family Help Lead Practitioner keeps the relationship with the family and coordinates support, and the MACPT does not become the family's lead practitioner.

By bringing these roles together, the MACPT is designed to improve the speed and quality of strategy discussions, share information earlier, reduce duplication between agencies, increase multi-agency ownership of child protection decisions, and give a more consistent response to risk, both inside and outside the home.

Hillingdon has introduced a multidisciplinary Child Protection team, bringing together specialist practitioners from Social Care, Health and Education alongside Police colleagues to strengthen the identification, assessment and protection of children at risk of harm. Social Care Lead Child Protection Practitioners (LCPPs) are supported by a Health Navigator and an Education Safeguarding Coordinator, who joined the service in July 2026. Additional LCPP recruitment is ongoing, and a Standard Operating Procedure is being developed to support consistent practice. Through a phased test-and-learn approach, referral pathways, thresholds, decision-making arrangements and links with Family Help are being refined ahead of full implementation in March 2027.

5. Vision for Family Help

Our vision is that every child in Hillingdon grows up safe, happy, healthy, loved, and able to thrive, supported by strong families, connected communities, and help that arrives early and makes a lasting difference.

Achieving our vision

This vision is achieved through our principles and priorities, our practice approach, the outcomes we seek for children and families, and the arrangements in place to measure progress and provide accountability. The *strategy on a page* below summarises how these elements work together to deliver our vision.

Our principles <i>What guides us</i>	1. Keeping children safe; 2. Strengthening families through early support; 3. Family Group Decision Making; 4. Whole family working; 5. Joined-up services; 6. Skilled multi-agency workforce.
Our priorities <i>What we focus on</i>	1. Help from professionals families know and trust; 2. The right support early; 3. Children and families at the centre of decisions and plans; 4. Strong local networks; 5. Professionals working together; 6. Keeping children safely within their families.
Our impact <i>The difference we will make</i>	1. Safe and protected from harm; 2. Needs identified early and addressed; 3. Happy and healthy; 4. Learning, engaged and thriving; 5. Living in stable and loving homes; 6. Positive relationships and social connections.
Our practice approach <i>How we work with families</i>	STARS practice model; Family Group Decision Making; Advocacy and family voice; Equality and anti-racist practice;
Our assurance <i>How we measure success</i>	Quality assurance and learning. Shared measures with baselines and targets (Chapter 6), Reporting quarterly and published in an annual review.
Our governance <i>How we deliver and oversee the strategy</i>	Every partner, through the commitments in Chapter 7, Overseen by the Family Help Delivery Group and the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership (Chapter 10).

Together, these elements provide a clear framework for delivering Family Help in Hillingdon and achieving our vision. The following chapters set out each component in more detail, beginning with our priorities, which describe the key areas of focus for improving outcomes for children, young people and families.

6. Principles

The principles and priorities in this strategy have been shaped by feedback from children, young people, parents and carers, including clear messages from our parents and carers groups about what matters most: telling their story only once, clear communication on the child and get support for the whole family. They also prioritised SEND, mental health help for young people and parents, trauma-informed practice, housing advice and support, honest challenge that helps parents make changes, support for separated parents and co-parenting, domestic abuse signposting and support, and a robust system that helps families receive joined-up support. Appendix 6 shows where each of these is addressed in this strategy.

The strategy has also been shaped through partner co-production including workshops involving children's services, health, education, police, housing and a wide range of community groups. Partners described Family Help as an early, community-based and coordinated model, delivered by the professional best placed to respond, with clear communication, shared accountability, proportionate thresholds and support rooted in trusted local places.

Partner collaboration has strengthened the strategy by testing the Family Help model through the perspectives of health, education, police, housing, wider children's services and community partners. This has helped shape a model based on equal partnership, clear communication, shared accountability and locality-based support, where the professional best placed to help can act early, coordinate with others and reduce unnecessary referral hand-offs for families.

Co-producing Family Help in Hillingdon



Children, young people, parents and carers sit at the centre of the model, with partners working around them as equal contributors. The outer cycle shows how co-production will continue through listening, shaping, delivering and learning, so that Family Help remains accessible, trusted, coordinated and focused on outcomes that matter to families and the partnership.

6.1 Principles (Beliefs and values that guide decision-making)

1. Keeping children safe

Children and young people are safe, protected from harm, and supported to thrive at home, in school, and within their communities, including online and from harm outside the home such as exploitation. Families receive timely support to reduce risks and create stable, nurturing environments where children can achieve their full potential.

2. Strengthening families through early support

Families can access the right support at the right time and in the right place, ensuring that difficulties are identified and addressed early before they become entrenched or escalate. Early targeted support services work proactively to build resilience and improve outcomes for children and families.

3. Family Group Decision Making

Families are empowered to take an active role in identifying their strengths, setting goals, and making safe, informed decisions about the support they need. Services work alongside families to develop solutions that build confidence, independence, and long-term resilience. Through Family Group Decision Making, families and their networks lead the plan wherever it is safe to do so.

4. Whole family working

Support is centred on the needs and strengths of the whole family, recognising that positive outcomes for children are achieved when parents, carers, siblings, and wider family networks are supported together. This includes addressing adults' needs alongside those of children, as part of a whole-family approach.

5. Joined up services

Professionals and agencies work together as one team in support of the family, sharing information appropriately and coordinating support to provide a seamless and effective response that meets the family's needs. This includes agreeing who is best placed to continue to support the family in the role of lead practitioner of the family support plan to address working in silos and promote a shared response.

6. Skilled multi-agency workforce

Professionals who work with children and families have the knowledge, skills, confidence, and tools to deliver high-quality support. Through ongoing learning and collaboration, the workforce is equipped to build strong relationships and achieve positive outcomes for families.

6.2 Cross-cutting enablers

The following enablers support the delivery of all six Family Help principles and are embedded throughout the strategy:

STARS practice approach

The STARS approach provides the practice thread running through the strategy. It brings together complementary models into one consistent framework so that Family Help is strengths-based in how we plan, trauma-informed in how we understand and respond, aspirational in how we support progress, relational in how we build trust, and safety-driven in how we act.

Family Group Decision Making

FGDM sits alongside STARS as a core practice approach. It ensures families and their networks are active decision-makers, not passive recipients of support, and helps Family Help Assessments and Plans translate professional concerns into family-led, safe and sustainable solutions.

Advocacy, co-design and family voice

Advocacy is a cross-cutting theme within children's social care and is not a standalone function. It ensures children, young people, parents and carers are heard, understood and informed, with meaningful opportunities to shape decisions, assessments, plans, service design and improvement. Through engagement, participation, continuous feedback, youth co-production and individual advocacy, Hillingdon will further strengthen a culture of working with families rather than doing to families.

Advocacy benefits families by helping children, young people, parents and carers feel heard, informed and able to influence decisions that affect them. It makes support clearer and less stigmatising by improving communication, explaining thresholds and expectations, reducing repetition, and ensuring families understand why decisions are made. When embedded well, advocacy strengthens trust, supports meaningful participation in assessments and plans, improves engagement, and helps services respond to what families actually need rather than designing support around professional systems.

Equality, inclusion and anti-racist practice

Partners will use data to understand who is and is not receiving help, challenge bias in assessment and decision-making, and respond in culturally informed ways, using the GGRRAAACCEEESSS framework alongside STARS. We will pay particular attention to disproportionality in child protection, care and youth justice, and to families who face barriers to seeking help, including families with no recourse to public funds and families of children with SEND.

Quality assurance and learning

Quality assurance is integral to Family Help and will provide the evidence base for continued improvement. Hillingdon uses a continuous development cycle to set clear standards, monitor practice, analyse themes, and embed learning through supervision, audit, performance reporting, feedback and targeted service review.

The cycle shows how Hillingdon will use quality assurance to drive continuous improvement in Family Help. Clear standards guide practice; practitioners deliver support through the STARS approach; evidence is gathered through audits, feedback, performance data and supervision; learning is analysed and translated into improvement activity; and impact is reviewed through governance so leaders can assure themselves that practice is improving outcomes for children, young people and families.

7. Family Help Self-assessment

Leaders across the partnership regularly assess how well Family Help is working, using performance data, case audits, feedback from families and partners, and learning from reviews. This section summarises what is working well and what we need to improve. The priorities, commitments and measures in this strategy are designed to address the areas for development.

What is working well

- Hillingdon's children's services were judged Outstanding by Ofsted in October 2023, with the Stronger Families Hub and our response to contextual safeguarding recognised.
- A single, locality-based Family Help service has operated since August 2025, with 11 teams across three localities and the Stronger Families Hub as a 24-hour integrated front door.
- Family Group Decision Making (Stronger Together), Family Network Support Packages, New Beginnings and the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team, with Lead Child Protection Practitioners, are in place.
- Early help for adolescents is strong: AXIS identified more than 800 potentially vulnerable children in 2025/26, Making Hayes Safe won the National Crimebeat Awards 2026, and first-time entrants to the youth justice system are below the London and national averages.

- Parents rate Family Hubs highly (4.9 out of 5 in October 2025), and partners have been engaged through the Family Help Delivery Group since May 2026.
- Family Group Decision Making is reducing escalation: none of the 23 children on child protection plans whose families participated in FGDM went on to pre-proceedings or care proceedings.
- Practice quality is good: case audits in 2025/26 found most practice to be good or outstanding, 327 staff have completed trauma-informed practice training, and all Children's Social Care staff can access clinical supervision through Psychology Hut.
- Capacity is growing: the Phase 3 business case approved in July 2026 is expanding Family Help from 11 to 14 teams.

What we need to improve, and how this strategy responds

Neglect and domestic abuse drive most Family Help and child protection work. This strategy sets partnership responses and measures for both (Chapters 1.6, 6 and 7).

- The Joint Targeted Area Inspection of the response to domestic abuse (July 2025) found five areas for improvement, particularly for unborn babies and children aged 0 to 7. The Safeguarding Partnership's improvement programme is under way, and we will evidence its impact through the planned MAPPA, MARAC, Stronger Families and multi-agency domestic abuse audits.
- Assessments, plans and records do not yet consistently show children's lived experience, cumulative risk and progress, and management oversight is not always clearly recorded. Our Quality Assurance Framework and the new All About Me recording template are addressing this.
- Our response to child sexual abuse and to homeless 16 and 17-year-olds needs to be more consistent, and the planned review of adolescent services will simplify pathways for young people.
- Some families still find support hard to navigate, and long waits for specialist services such as CAMHS and neurodevelopmental assessment leave gaps. Partners will agree interim support while families wait (Chapter 11).
- Culture change is not complete: partners are still building confidence to lead support themselves. Partnership commitments and joint training address this (Chapters 11 and 12).
- School attendance, the number of 16 and 17-year-olds not in education, employment or training, and self-harm admissions among 10 to 14-year-olds are all worse than London averages. These are shared measures with education and health (Chapter 10).
- Children from Black and Mixed heritage backgrounds are over-represented at the sharper end of the system. Partners will use data to identify and address disproportionality (Chapter 6 and 10).

- Information is held on separate systems across agencies. We will strengthen information-sharing protocols and adopt the single unique identifier for children when it is introduced under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.
- The Multi-Agency Child Protection Team will be fully implemented by March 2027, and parent and young person representation in Family Help governance is still being developed.
- Not all measures yet have baselines and targets. These will be agreed by December 2026 (Chapter 10).
- This self-assessment will be updated each year, as part of the annual review reported to the Family Help Delivery Group and the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership. It is consistent with the children's services self-evaluation of September 2026.

8. Strategic Priorities

Our current focus and course of action

The infographic below illustrates the delivery thread for these priorities. Each priority will be supported by clear standards, delivered through the STARS practice approach, tested through quality assurance evidence, strengthened through learning and improvement activity, and reviewed through governance to ensure that practice is making a measurable difference for children, young people and families.

Our priorities focus on ensuring that children, young people and families receive help that is relational, timely, family-led, local, coordinated and continuously improving. They translate the Family Help vision into practical action by strengthening trusted relationships, offering support earlier, placing families and networks at the centre of planning, building support around local communities, working as one partnership and using evidence, feedback and learning to improve outcomes.

8.1 Our Priorities

1. **Help families get support** from professionals they know and trust.
2. **Provide the right support early** to prevent problems from becoming bigger concerns.
3. **Put children and families at the centre** of decisions and plans that affect them.
4. **Strengthen locality community networks** so families can access support close to home.

5. **Give professionals the knowledge and skills to work together** across services to help families.
6. **Keep children safely within their families** wherever possible and help our communities understand that this is what Family Help and Children's Social Care work to do.

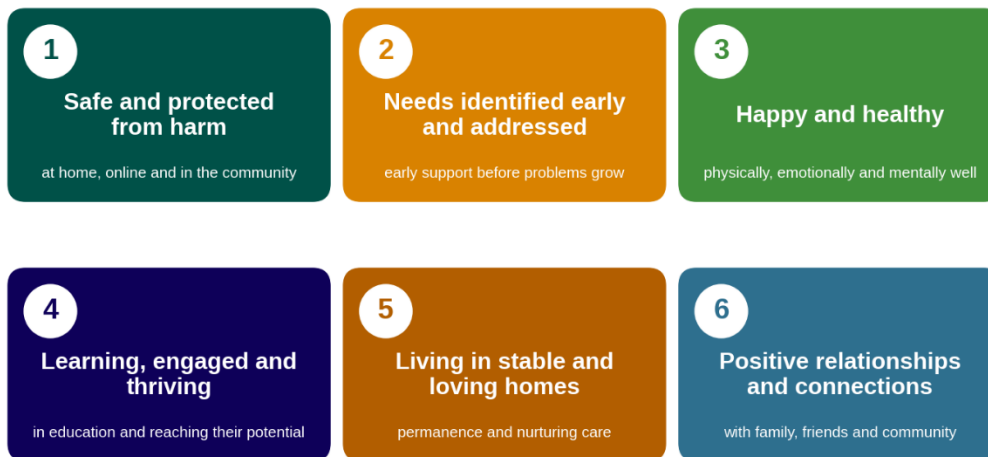
Family Help is offered with families' agreement. Families can decline support, unless there are concerns that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, when statutory child protection procedures apply, or a court order is in place.



9. Outcomes

The outcomes describe the difference Family Help should make for children, families and the wider partnership. Children should be safe, healthy, learning, connected and able to grow up in stable homes. Families should feel heard, understand who is helping them, access support close to home and lead safe planning with their trusted networks. Partners should work as one system, share information effectively, reduce duplication and use local networks, shared workforce development and joint accountability to improve outcomes.

9.1 Agreed outcomes:



For every child in Hillingdon, delivered by the whole partnership

1. Safe and protected from harm

Children in Hillingdon are safe, protected and supported where they live, learn and spend time, including online.

2. Support needs are identified early and addressed

Children in Hillingdon get early support, so their needs are recognised and addressed and they can thrive.

3. Happy and healthy

Children in Hillingdon are physically, emotionally and mentally well, with confidence and hope for the future.

4. Learning, engaged and thriving

Children in Hillingdon have access to education to learn, achieve and develop the skills they need to have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

5. Living in stable and loving homes

Children in Hillingdon experience permanence, stability and nurturing care, wherever they live.

6. Positive relationships and social connections

Children have strong, positive relationships with their family, friends and community.

These outcomes are designed to deliver the four outcomes of the Children's Social Care National Framework 2026. They also line up with the ambitions in our Best Start in Life Strategy (children who are safe, healthy, happy, engaged, valued and ready to learn), our Care Strategy, the SEND Reform Plan and the Youth Justice Strategy, so that partners work to one set of shared ambitions.

The table below shows how this strategy delivers the outcomes and enablers of the Children's Social Care National Framework 2026, which Ofsted uses when inspecting local authority children's services.

National Framework 2026	Where this strategy delivers it	How we will evidence it
Outcome 1: Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need	Principle 2; priorities 1, 2 and 6; outcomes 2 and 5; single Family Help offer (1.2, 1.9)	Time from identified need to support; re-referrals; children supported safely at home; family feedback
Outcome 2: Children and young people are safe in and outside their homes	Principle 1; outcome 1; MACPT (1.7); harm outside the home (1.2, 2.3)	Timeliness of strategy discussions; repeat child protection plans; harm outside the home and missing indicators
Outcome 3: Children and young people are supported by their family network	Principle 3; priority 3; Family Group Decision Making and Family Network Support Packages (1.5)	Family Group Decision Making meetings held; plans sustained at review; support packages reviewed for impact
Outcome 4: Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes	Outcome 5; links with the Care Strategy 2025–2030; reunification planning (1.5)	Children entering care; reunification supported by Family Group Decision Making (shared with Care Strategy measures)
Enabler: multi-agency working	Partnership commitments (Chapter 11); Stronger Families Hub; MACPT	Partner feedback; multi-agency audits; Delivery Group reports
Enabler: leaders drive conditions for effective practice	Governance (Chapter 14); self-assessment (7); annual review	Quarterly quality and performance reports; annual review published
Enabler: the workforce is equipped and effective	Workforce development (Chapter 12); STARS	Training completion; practitioner confidence; audit findings on practice quality

10. Evidence of impact

The partnership will use one outcomes framework that combines performance data, practice evidence and lived experience. Each measure will have a baseline, target, data source, reporting frequency and accountable lead in the delivery plan. Reports will distinguish current performance from improvement activity and will analyse outcomes by relevant equality characteristics to identify disproportionality.

Area	Performance indicators	What this will help us understand
Voice of the Child and Family Voice	Percentage of children, young people, parents and carers who say they were involved in decisions that affected them.	Whether Family Help is genuinely family-led and whether families can see their views reflected in decisions, assessments and plans.
Family Group Decision Making	Number of FGDM's completed. Percentage of FGDM plans sustained at review. Number of Family Network Support Packages considered, approved and reviewed. Evidence that FNSPs removed practical barriers, supported family-led plans and helped de-escalate social care involvement.	Whether families and trusted networks are being supported to lead safe planning and whether plans remain realistic, owned and effective over time.
Workforce	Training completion rates for core Family Help, STARS, safeguarding, FGDM and partnership learning. Staff confidence measures before and after training.	Whether practitioners have the knowledge, confidence and shared practice framework needed to deliver consistent, high-quality Family Help.
Safeguarding	Timeliness of strategy discussions. Outcomes of section 47 child protection enquires. Repeat Child Protection Plans.	Whether safeguarding decisions are timely, effective and reducing repeat or escalating harm for children.
Family Help	Seamless transitions to universal services success rates. Re-referral rates.	Whether Family Help is supporting children and families to receive the right help at the right time, sustain progress and reduce avoidable escalation or repeat referral.

Driven by Data and children's best interests

Data will be gathered through operational performance systems, audit activity, FGDM records, workforce training data, supervision records, surveys, focus groups, closing-case feedback, complaints, compliments and direct feedback from children, young people, parents, carers and professionals. These sources will be considered together, with feedback treated as equal evidence alongside performance data, so that the partnership can understand not only what is changing, but also what is working, where barriers remain and what children, families and practitioners say needs to improve.

Findings will be triangulated through quarterly quality and learning reports to the Family Help Delivery Group. These reports will set out key themes, risks, progress and improvement actions, with strategic issues escalated through the Executive Transformation Group and the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership as part of regular assurance and annual review. When the Delivery Group is no longer required, the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership will maintain continuity of oversight, scrutiny and quality assurance.

Compliance with Families First will be reported through the same performance framework. This will include evidence of a single Family Help offer, lead practitioner arrangements, one assessment and one live plan, FGDM and Family Network Support Package activity, implementation of the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team, workforce readiness, refreshed protocols and timely safeguarding decision-making. Improvements to recording in the case management system, including the new All About Me template, and to Power BI dashboards will make this information more accurate, consistent and easier to use.

Quality assurance will be integral to the delivery of this strategy. Hillingdon will use a continuous development cycle that sets clear expectations for practice, monitors whether standards are being met, analyses learning from performance data, audits, supervision and feedback, and translates that learning into action planning, workforce development, service improvement and review. The annual review will therefore explain both whether indicators have changed and what children, families and practitioners have experienced.

Baselines and targets

Each measure will have a baseline, taken at the launch of Family Help in August 2025 or at the end of 2025/26 where data was not collected earlier, and a target agreed by the Family Help Delivery Group by December 2026. Both will be published in the delivery plan. Where another Hillingdon strategy already sets a target, we will use it rather than create a new one, for example:

- Good Level of Development: 75.5% of all children and 61.3% of children eligible for free school meals by 2027/28 (Best Start in Life Strategy);
- SEN Support rising from about 12% to 14.5% of pupils, and children with EHCPs educated in mainstream schools rising from 54% to 59%, by 2029 (SEND Reform Plan);

- young people with EHCPs who are not in education, employment or training falling from 16.1% to 13% by 2029 (SEND Reform Plan);
- first-time entrants to the youth justice system staying below the London and national averages (Youth Justice Strategy 2024–2029).

We will also report the indicators the Department for Education collects each quarter for the Families First programme, so that local and national reporting use the same figures.

10.1 Quantitative Measures

Theme	Indicators
Safeguarding and Reducing harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in avoidable repeat referrals to Children's Social Care. • Reduction in the number of children experiencing significant harm and requiring Section 47 enquiries. • Increased use of early help and targeted support, resulting in reduced demand for statutory interventions, with more children's special educational needs met earlier through SEN Support, in line with the SEND Reform Plan (this does not affect any child's right to an EHC needs assessment). • Children in multi-agency child protection intervention where harm outside the home is the primary concern; missing episodes, children missing repeatedly, and the percentage offered a return home conversation within 72 hours; first-time entrants to the youth justice system.
Timely Access to Support and Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in the time between identification of need and the provision of support. • Reduced waiting periods without support for children and families awaiting specialist interventions
Education, Learning and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved school attendance and engagement in education. • Improved early years outcomes, including school readiness and achievement of a Good Level of Development at EYFS. • For children receiving Family Help, compared with all pupils: attendance and persistent absence, suspensions and exclusions, the percentage meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2, and Attainment 8 at Key Stage 4. (Progress 8 is not

	<p>being published for 2025 or 2026 because those cohorts have no Key Stage 2 results.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in early identification of children 0-5 years old with SEND needs through the Early Years Assessment Centre, Early Years Tracking Panel and Early Identification Toolkit. • Increased participation in education, employment, training and positive community activities. • Reduction in the number of students with SEND who are persistently or severely absent. • Reduction in the proportion of young people with SEND who are not in Education, Employment and Training by age 19.
Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved attendance at health and developmental appointments. • Take-up of health visiting reviews (including the 2 to 2½ year review) and childhood immunisations for children receiving Family Help, shared with the Best Start in Life Strategy; timely access to mental health support for children and parents and emotional wellbeing services such as Kooth, P3.
Positive Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in offending and anti-social behaviour among children and young people. • Increased participation in education, employment, training and positive community activities.

10.2 Qualitative Measures

The strategy will draw on a wide range of assurance evidence, including:

- Feedback from children and families
- Feedback from partners
- Case studies
- Children's Social Care audits and multi-agency audits
- Themed deep dives
- Focus groups
- Complaints and compliments
- Performance dashboards
- Inspection learning

Theme	Qualitative Measures
Child, Family and community voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from children, young people and families demonstrates that services are accessible, responsive and make a positive difference, gathered through engagement activities, surveys, focus groups and targeted outreach. • Feedback from families that they were able to contribute to decisions and plans. • Evidence that advocacy, co-design and children, young people and family's voice are embedded through participation forums, individual advocacy, representation in decision-making and clear "You Said, We Did" feedback mechanisms. • Evidence that parent and carer feedback has shaped service design and improvement, including communications, SEND provision, mental health support, whole-family approaches, housing advice, domestic abuse services and co-parenting support.
Quality of Practice and Continuous Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence from audits, supervision and family feedback that STARS principles are consistently reflected in assessment, planning, communication and decision-making. • Learning from multi-agency reviews, audits and reflective practice sessions.
Family Outcomes and Early Help Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case studies demonstrating successful early support, prevention and Family Help support. • Examples of strengthened family resilience, confidence and ability to manage challenges independently. • Evidence that Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is offered early and used effectively across Family Help, Child Protection, pre-proceedings and reunification planning, including family feedback, quality of plans, review completion and outcomes for children remaining safely within family networks.
Multi-Agency Partnership Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from practitioners and partners on the effectiveness of multi-agency working, communication and information sharing. • Evidence from partner workshops and multi-agency feedback that Family Help is improving communication, creating smoother pathways for families, clarifying thresholds, strengthening locality networks and supporting children and families while awaiting specialist services.

10.3 Overall Measure of Success

Success will be evidenced by children and families receiving the right support at the right time, experiencing improved outcomes, reduced need for statutory intervention, and greater confidence and resilience to sustain positive change. Partnership agencies will work collectively to ensure progress, learn from practice, and continuously improve the Family Help offer.

11. Partnership commitments

Family Help only works if every partner plays its part. These commitments were developed with partners through the Family Help Delivery Group and the July and September 2026 workshops. They set out what each partner will do differently. Partners reviewed them on the second draft of this strategy in October 2026, and each partner will name a lead through the Family Help Delivery Group.

All partners will:

- Act early, using the relationship they already have with the family, before referring on;
- Where there are no immediate safeguarding concerns, talk to Family Help, the Stronger Families Hub or the relevant service when unsure, rather than making a referral by default. Where there are safeguarding concerns, refer without delay in line with their own procedures;
- Contribute to Family Help assessments and plans, and take on the lead practitioner role where they are best placed;
- Share information lawfully, proportionately and promptly, so that families tell their story only once;
- Identify, respond to and reduce risk, including harm outside the home and online, and follow safeguarding procedures without delay where a child may be at risk of significant harm;
- Use the STARS practice approach and Family Group Decision Making, and take part in joint training;
- Agree interim support while a child or family waits for a specialist service;
- Use their own data to identify and challenge bias and disproportionality in their decisions.

Children's Services (Family Help, the Stronger Families Hub and the MACPT) will:

- Provide a single Family Help offer with one assessment and one live plan, and keep the same lead practitioner wherever possible, including if child protection action becomes necessary;
- Offer Family Group Decision Making early, at every stage from first contact to reunification;
- Publish clear threshold guidance and explain decisions, and the alternatives available, to families and professionals when a service cannot be offered;
- Provide consultation, locality surgeries and school-linked key workers, so partners can get advice without making a referral;
- Report progress, data and learning openly to the Family Help Delivery Group.

The police will:

- Provide appropriately senior officers to the MACPT and the Stronger Families Hub, and share police information promptly for strategy discussions and section 47 enquiries;
- Lead criminal investigations under police procedures, agreeing with the MACPT at the strategy discussion how the investigation and the child protection enquiry will run alongside each other;
- Help frontline officers recognise when a family needs early help, not only when a crime or significant harm is suspected, and connect families to Family Help;
- Work with AXIS, the Adolescent Service and partners to identify and disrupt exploitation and serious youth violence, respond to children who go missing, and treat exploited children as victims first.

Health partners (North West London ICB, CNWL, The Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and GPs) will:

- Agree how health services, contribute to Family Help plans, and act as lead practitioner where they are best placed;
- Provide health members to the MACPT (our Health Navigator joined in July 2026) and the Stronger Families Hub;
- follow their 'was not brought' procedures when a child misses appointments, escalating to a referral where concerns remain, so concerns are understood in context;
- Improve timely access to mental health support for children and parents, including support while waiting;
- In acute hospital settings, including the emergency department, refer safeguarding concerns to the Stronger Families Hub without delay, as staff often do not know the child or family, and share information to support assessment and planning;
- Attend and contribute to strategy discussions, Family Help and child protection meetings when invited.

Education (schools, early years settings, colleges and the Virtual School) will:

- Act as core Family Help and safeguarding partners, as set out in the Education CSC Reset Delivery Plan 2026–2029;
- Work with school-linked Family Help key workers under the agreed Memorandum of Understanding;
- Share attendance, inclusion, SEND and safeguarding information early and proportionately, so emerging needs are identified sooner;
- Provide the education member of the MACPT, and extend the Virtual School's support to children with a social worker and children in kinship care.

Best Start Family Hubs and Children's Centres will:

- Act as a welcoming front door to early support in each locality, including for families of children with SEND;
- Identify early the families who may need Family Help and connect them through the Stronger Families Hub, and support families stepping down from Family Help;
- Deliver evidence-based parenting and home learning programmes, and support families of children waiting for an autism assessment;

- Deliver the Best Start in Life Strategy commitments shared with this strategy, including better identifying children who need Family Help.

Housing will:

- Take part in the Family Help Delivery Group and locality networks;
- offer early housing advice and homelessness prevention to families receiving Family Help;
- Act early when staff notice neglect or unmet need, by connecting with Family Help or the child's school rather than defaulting to a referral.

The Hillingdon Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service (HDAAS) will:

- Check with the Stronger Families Hub whether a family is known when supporting a victim of domestic abuse;
- Work with the allocated social worker to share concerns, information, risk assessments and safety plans;
- Attend and contribute to strategy discussions, child in need and Family Help meetings, initial child protection conferences and core groups when invited;
- Make a referral to children's social care where risks are identified and the family is not known to the Stronger Families Hub, or where a client declines HDAAS support;
- Keep an IDVA co-located in the Stronger Families Hub, and a duty worker available to social workers Monday to Friday for case discussion, advice and guidance.

The voluntary, community and faith sector will:

- Offer trusted, local support and venues where families feel comfortable;
- Take part in locality networks and, where best placed, act as lead practitioner;
- Help us reach families who do not usually use statutory services and bring their views to the Delivery Group.

12. Workforce development

Through this five-year strategy, we will build a skilled, confident, and adaptable workforce across Hillingdon Children's Services and the wider partnership, ready to respond to evolving needs and deliver lasting positive impact for children and families. We will equip staff with the skills, knowledge, tools and development opportunities needed to deliver tailored support that meets the needs of families, including delivering workforce development that supports Families First compliance, including Family Help Lead Practitioner expectations, thresholds, information sharing, SEND, extra-familial harm, domestic abuse, whole-family practice, STARS, FGDM and multi-agency safeguarding.

Through a clear Workforce Development plan and pathway, we will build a compassionate, confident and consistent workforce that places children and families at the heart of practice with our shared practice framework (STARS) shaping and guiding all the training we deliver across the partnership.

327 staff in Children's Services have completed our trauma-informed practice training, which continues for new staff in 2026/27. All Children's Social Care staff can access reflective group and one-to-one clinical supervision through Psychology Hut, which helps practitioners manage the emotional impact of the work.

What we will do:

Theme	Objective/activity
Workforce capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a partnership-wide skills and knowledge assessment to identify workforce strengths, development needs and training priorities. • Ensure practitioners across all services have the skills, knowledge and support needed to provide effective help to children, young people and families. • Provide clear access to shared training and learning opportunities for everyone working with or supporting families. • Train practitioners to respond to what families say they need most, including clear communication, trauma-informed challenge, SEND awareness, whole-family working, domestic abuse support and co-parenting. • Strengthen one-team working around children and families by sharing knowledge, learning and expertise across services. • Train frontline staff in the police, housing, health and education to recognise when a family needs help, including signs of neglect, domestic abuse, exploitation and harm outside the home, and to know how to connect families to Family Help.
2. Practice Excellence and Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed the STARS practice approach across the partnership so assessment, planning, conversations, supervision and decision-making are consistently strengths-based, trauma-informed, aspirational, relational and safety-driven. • Use Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the GGRRAAC-CEEESSS framework alongside STARS so practice recognises identity, challenges inequality and bias, and responds in culturally informed and anti-discriminatory ways.
3. Family-Led Decision Making and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build practitioner confidence in high-quality FGDM, including preparation, child voice, informed consent, cultural humility, safety planning, private family time, plan confirmation and review. • Ensure practitioners understand when and how to use Family Network Support Packages, including eligibility, evidence required, approval routes, sustainability, review arrangements and how FNSPs differ from general financial assistance.

4. Participation, Communication and Partnership Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support practitioners to communicate with families in a clear, respectful, supportive and non-judgemental way. • Develop workforce confidence in advocacy and participation, including clear communication, inclusive engagement, youth co-production, “you said – we did” feedback loops and working with VCS/community partners. • Promote joined-up support so families experience a consistent response, regardless of which service they access.
5. Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed continuous learning and improvement so practice adapts to need and delivers better outcomes for children and families. • Use the Quality Assurance Framework to support reflective supervision, CYP case file checklists, audit learning, targeted learning events and clear development action plans.

13. Delivery plan

Implementation began in March 2025, and the locality-based service has operated since August 2025. The roadmap records that development, but the strategy’s forward focus is on three delivery horizons:

- Completing the core model by March 2027;
- Embedding and improving partnership practice from 2027;
- Demonstrating sustained impact through annual review to 2031.

Family Help roadmap 2025–2031



Underpinned throughout by STARS practice, quality assurance, locality delivery, co-production and shared accountability

1. Discover (Scoping & Planning)

March 2025 – August 2025

- Complete discovery, scoping and implementation planning for the Family Help and Stronger Families Hub model.
- Design the initial service model, prepare operational arrangements and confirm readiness for launch.

2. Launch

(Family Help Service and the renewed Stronger Families Multi Agency Hub Goes Live)

August 2025

- Launch the locality-based Family Help Service across Hillingdon.

3. Test & Learn (Initial Phase Testing)

August 2025 – July 2026

- Test the initial operating model and identify learning from early implementation.
- Gather feedback from practitioners, partners, children, young people and families.
- Launch the Multi Agency Child Protection Team and New Beginnings Team
- Hold partner workshops to test the emerging model with health, education, police, housing, children's services, Family Hubs and voluntary/community partners.

- Use feedback from children, young people, parents and carers to refine priorities, strengthen co-production and test whether Family Help is improving families' lived experience.
- Test and refine how FGDM is offered early, prepared well, recorded, reviewed and used to strengthen Family Help Plans.
- Test and monitor the use of Family Network Support Packages so they are considered early, linked to family-led plans, reviewed for impact and used proportionately to de-escalate social care involvement where safe.
- Refine locality arrangements, including the updated locality map in May 2026.

4. Collaborate & Shape (Co-production & Partnership Development)

July 2026 – September 2026

- Strengthen the model with multi-agency partners and confirm shared delivery commitments.
- Use partner workshop learning to confirm how health, education, police, housing, community organisations and children's services will work as equal partners around children and families.
- Agree how partners will lead, co-work, share information, escalate concerns and provide interim support where specialist services have waiting lists.
- Co-produce the Family Help Strategy with children, young people, families and partners.
- Present the Family Help Strategy through the agreed governance and Cabinet approval route.

5. Commit (Partnership strategy agreed)

October 2026

- Secure formal agreement of the Family Help Strategy through Cabinet and the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership.
- Confirm the partnership's direction to 2031, building on the learning from the first year of Family Help.

6. Implement (Partnership delivery)

October 2026 – December 2026

- Deliver the partnership commitments in Chapter 11, building on the service that has operated since August 2025.
- Embed new ways of working across teams, services and partner agencies.
- Implement agreed partnership arrangements so families experience coordinated support, fewer referral hand-offs and clearer communication across services.

7. Embed & Sustain (Full Implementation)

January 2027 – March 2027

- Align related services, pathways and governance arrangements to support sustainable delivery.
- Strengthen partnership arrangements, shared accountability and performance oversight.

- Use ongoing partner feedback, multi-agency audit and locality learning to sustain collaboration, strengthen shared thresholds and improve the Family Help offer.
- Confirm by March 2027 that Families First delivery requirements are embedded, including the single Family Help offer, lead practitioner model, one live plan, refreshed protocols, FGDM, MACPT and governance reporting.

8. Improve & Review (Monitor and evaluation)

April 2027 – 2031

- Publish an annual review each autumn against the measures in Chapter 10, starting in October 2027.
- Refresh the delivery plan each year and review the strategy in 2029 alongside the SEND Reform Plan, the Education CSC Reset Delivery Plan and the Council Priorities 2026–2030.
- Keep co-producing with children, young people and families through the Families First parents group and participation groups, and report back through 'You said, we did'.

14. Governance

The governance arrangements below show how strategic oversight, senior transformation leadership and operational delivery will work together to provide assurance, manage risk and maintain momentum as the Family Help Strategy is implemented.

Safeguarding Partnership

Provides strategic oversight, system assurance and multi-agency accountability for safeguarding and Family Help transformation.

Key focus: alignment with statutory duties, partnership challenge, assurance on impact, escalation of strategic risks and agreement of system priorities.

↓ strategic direction, assurance and escalation

Executive Transformation Group

Leads senior decision-making and transformation oversight across Families First, ensuring delivery remains aligned with corporate, partnership and inspection priorities.

Key focus: resource alignment, risk management, delivery unblock, approval of major changes and reporting progress to senior governance.

↓ delivery oversight, decisions and performance challenge

Family Help Delivery Group

Coordinates the implementation of the Family Help Strategy and holds partners to account for delivery of agreed priorities and actions.

Key focus: delivery plan monitoring, performance review, lived experience feedback, practice learning, communications, workforce development and issue escalation.

Workforce and Practice Development Implements the workforce development plan, embeds the STARS practice approach, coordinates partnership training, supports supervision, and strengthens consistent strengths-based, trauma-informed, aspirational, relational and safety-driven practice across services.	Performance, Quality Assurance and Learning Tracks agreed measures of success, reviews performance data, audits, case file checklists, feedback, complaints, compliments, inspection learning and targeted service reviews, and reports themes through quality assurance governance to inform annual strategy review.
Locality and Partnership Implementation Supports delivery across North, South East and South West localities, strengthens Family Hub and community links, and ensures partners contribute to local solutions.	Communications and Co-production Ensures children, young people, parents, carers and practitioners influence service design, communications, feedback loops and ongoing improvement.

Links with other partnership boards

Family Help depends on, and contributes to, other partnership priorities. The Family Help Delivery Group will share progress and risks with the Best Start in Life Delivery Group and the Children's Health and Care Partnership (which reports to the Health and Wellbeing Board), the SEND Executive Partnership Board, the Youth Justice Strategic Partnership Board, the Safer Hillingdon Partnership, the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Education CSC Reset delivery group.

Managing risk

The main risks to delivery, and how we will manage them, are:

Risks	How we will manage it
Partners do not have capacity to take on lead practitioner roles or MACPT membership	Commitments agreed and named leads confirmed through the Delivery Group; joint training; unresolved issues escalated to the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership
Demand and complexity keep rising (neglect, domestic abuse, SEND, harm outside the home)	Earlier help through Family Hubs and localities; quarterly review of demand data; resources targeted where need is greatest
Long waits for specialist services leave families without help	Interim support agreed between partners; escalation to the integrated care board and SEND partnership
Workforce recruitment and retention	Workforce development plan; STARS practice; supervision and learning offer across the partnership
Information is not shared quickly across different systems	Information-sharing protocols; single unique identifier when introduced under the 2026 Act

National funding changes after the current programme	Annual review and prioritisation; shared partner re-sourcing; early engagement in the council budget process
National policy and inspection change, including Ofsted's reforms to ILACS planned for 2027	Annual refresh of the strategy and delivery plan; horizon scanning by the Delivery Group

An Equality Analysis has been undertaken as part of the development of this Strategy. The strategy is expected to have a positive impact on children and families with protected characteristics, particularly age, disability and race, by improving earlier access to help, addressing disproportionality and making services easier to reach. The assessment will be reviewed each year alongside the annual review.

15. Putting Our Vision into Practice

Children, young people, and families achieve the best outcomes when services, communities, and families work alongside one another. Together, we will develop a Family Help approach that builds on the strengths of children, families, and communities, making it easier to access the right support at the right time.

Our shared priorities will be transformed into action through a jointly owned programme of improvement, driven by collective ambition, accountability and a steadfast commitment to better outcomes for children and families. Progress will be championed through the Family Help Delivery Group and supported by strong partnership governance, including oversight from the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership.

We will celebrate success, learn from innovation, and openly reflect on the areas where we can go further. By creating a culture of curiosity, learning and continuous improvement, we will use the experiences of children, young people, families, practitioners and partners to shape and strengthen our approach.

Through ongoing co-production, reflective practice and partnership collaboration, we will publish an annual review against the measures set out in Chapter 6, tracking our progress, demonstrating impact, and identifying priorities for the year ahead. In doing so, we will ensure that Family Help continues to evolve, innovate and deliver the right support, at the right time, for every child and family in Hillingdon. The first annual review will be published in October 2027.

16. Document control

Strategy owner:	Assistant Director, Family Help, on behalf of the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership
Approved by:	Cabinet, [date]; endorsed by the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership, [date]
Review:	Annual review each autumn from October 2027; full review by 2029, alongside the SEND Reform Plan and the Council Priorities 2026–2030

Appendices

Appendix 1: [Family Help Locality Map](#)

Appendix 2: [Social GGRRAAACCEEESSS](#)

Appendix 3: You Said, We Did.

Appendix 4: How this strategy links with other Hillingdon strategies

Appendix 3: You said, we did

What parents told us	Where this strategy responds	What will change
Tell our story only once; clear communication from practitioners	Chapter 3.5, 6 (priority 1), 11	One assessment and one live plan, a consistent lead practitioner, lawful information sharing between partners, and plans shared with families in plain English.
Focus on the impact on the child	Chapter 3.5, 8.1, priority 3	Every assessment starts from the child's lived experience; children's views are recorded and used in plans.
SEND children and families	Chapters 2.2, 3.1, 4.2, 6, 6.2, 9.1, 10	Family Help linked with Family Hubs as the SEND front door and with school locality clusters; SEND in workforce training; SEND measures in Chapter 6.
Early mental health help for young people and parents	Chapters 1.4, 2.2, 2.4, 4.2, 10.2 and 11	Emotional wellbeing in every plan; links with CAMHS, Mental Health Support Teams, perinatal and adult mental health services; support while waiting.
Trauma-informed practice	Chapters 3.2, 6.2	STARS practice model; a trauma-informed, trauma-responsive and relationship-based workforce.
Housing advice and support	Chapters 4.2, 11	Housing on the Delivery Group; early housing advice and homelessness prevention for families in Family Help.
Supporting the whole family, including younger siblings of older teenagers	Chapters 6.1 (principle 4), 3.5	Whole-family assessments consider every child in the household, including younger siblings of teenagers receiving support.
Challenging parents in order to support change	Chapters 6.2, 3.2, 3.4, Appendix 1	Honest, respectful challenge, being clear about worries and bottom lines, as part of STARS and Family Group Decision Making.
Working with separated parents and supporting co-parenting	Chapters 3.5, 10	Both parents involved in plans where safe; practitioner training on working with separated parents; co-parenting support to be developed with partners.
A robust system that supports families	Chapters 10, 11, 12, 14,	Shared measures and targets, partner commitments, clear governance and a published annual review.
Domestic abuse signposting and support	Chapters 4.2, 7 and 8	HDAAS alongside Family Help, with an IDVA in the Stronger Families Hub; partnership training; measures on children on plans because of domestic abuse.

Appendix 4: How this strategy links with other Hillingdon strategies

Strategy	What it commits to	How Family Help connects
Stronger Families Strategy 2021–2025	Early help from the right person at the right time; Think Family; trauma-informed practice; families tell their story once.	Replaced by this strategy; its principles are carried into Family Help.
Best Start in Life Strategy 2026–2031	Every child safe, healthy, happy, engaged, valued and ready to learn; Good Level of Development 75.5% (61.3% for children eligible for free school meals) by 2027/28; Family Hubs as the front door.	Family Help works alongside Family Hubs; shared measures on Good Level of Development, health visiting reviews and babies on child protection plans (Best Start commitments 2 and 6).
Care Strategy 2025–2030	Children grow up within their families and networks when safe; kinship care; Family Group Conferences; 'cared for children' language.	Family Group Decision Making and Family Network Support Packages to prevent children entering care and to support reunification; shared language.
SEND Reform Plan 2026–2029 (delivering the SEND and AP Strategy)	Earlier identification; Family Hubs as the front door; school locality clusters; SEN Support up from about 12% to 14.5% by 2029; families tell their story once.	Same three localities; SEND in Family Help assessments; shared measures on attendance, NEET and SEN Support.
Youth Justice Strategy 2024–2029 and Plan 2025–26	Child First; prevention and early intervention; addressing disproportionality; AXIS, Turnaround and Engage.	AXIS is part of the Family Help offer; a joint response to exploitation and harm outside the home.
Education CSC Reset Delivery Plan 2026–2029	Schools as core safeguarding and Family Help partners; information sharing; extended Virtual School role; vulnerable learner oversight.	School-linked key workers; education member of the MACPT; shared escalation routes.
Council Priorities 2026–2030	Six priorities to make Hillingdon an even better place to live, work and invest, including Putting our residents first, Future generations and Easy to deal with.	Family Help contributes to all six priorities (see 'Supporting the Council Priorities 2026–2030' in Chapter 1).

Glossary of terms

Term	What it means
Family Help	A single offer of support for children and families with additional or complex needs, bringing together targeted early help and support for children in need.
Family Help Lead Practitioner	The professional who coordinates a family's support and holds the relationship with them. They may come from any partner agency.
Stronger Families Hub	Hillingdon's integrated front door for advice, information and requests for support, open 24 hours a day.
Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT)	A team of social workers, police, health and education professionals who lead decisions when a child may be at risk of significant harm.
Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP)	An experienced social worker in the MACPT who makes child protection decisions.
Section 17 and section 47	Parts of the Children Act 1989: section 17 covers support for children in need; section 47 covers enquiries when a child may be suffering significant harm.
Family Group Decision Making (Stronger Together)	Meetings where a family and their wider network make a plan to keep a child safe and well, with professionals' support.
Family Network Support Package	Practical, time-limited help that enables a family network to care for or support a child.
Harm outside the home (extra-familial harm)	Harm that happens outside the family, for example exploitation, serious youth violence, or harm online or in the community.
AXIS	Hillingdon's service that identifies and works with children at risk of exploitation and serious youth violence.
STARS	Our shared practice approach: strengths-based, trauma-informed, aspirational, relational and safety-driven.
SEN Support and EHCP	SEN Support is extra help in school for children with special educational needs. An Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is a legal plan for children with more complex needs.
Good Level of Development	The national measure of children's development at the end of Reception (age 5).
No recourse to public funds (NRPF)	An immigration condition that prevents some people from claiming most benefits and housing assistance.
Cared for children	Children in the care of the council; the term chosen by Hillingdon's young people.



Equality and Human Rights **Analysis**

1. Introduction

The Hillingdon Family Help Strategy 2026–2031 is a partnership strategy for the London Borough of Hillingdon and the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership.

It sets the long-term direction for Family Help: the single offer of support that brings together targeted early help and support for children in need, together with multi-agency child protection (the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team) and Family Group Decision Making, as required by the national Families First Partnership Programme and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.

The strategy replaces the previous Stronger Families Strategy 2021–2025 and consolidates the learning from the first year of Family Help's implementation, sets commitments for every partner, and sets outcomes and measures to 2031.

This analysis is undertaken to inform the strategy in respect of its equality and human rights impact.

This analysis has been carried out by Valentin Danciu, Assistant Director – Family Help, Children's Services (strategy owner).

2. Legal context

The legal and policy context to the development of the Strategy and for the purposes of this analysis includes:

- Equality Act 2010, section 149 (Public Sector Equality Duty): due regard to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations.
- Human Rights Act 1998 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Children Act 1989 (section 17, children in need; section 47, child protection enquiries) and Children Act 2004 (sections 10 and 11).
- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 (Royal Assent 29 April 2026): multi-agency child protection teams, the offer of Family Group Decision Making, information sharing and a single unique identifier for children.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, which strengthens expectations on anti-discriminatory, anti-racist and culturally aware practice; Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (children as victims in their own right); UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

3. National and local policy context

Family Help is part of a national approach, under The Families First Partnership Programme (2025) making support for children, young people, and families easier to access and more connected. It aims to ensure families can get the right help at the

earliest opportunity, with services working together to provide support for the whole family.

The strategy also reflects the updated statutory guidance published in March 2026. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 confirms that Family Help brings targeted early help and section 17 support together into one seamless offer, with fewer handovers and a single family plan. It also strengthens expectations for multi-agency child protection, anti-discriminatory practice and responding to harm outside the home.

The Children's Social Care National Framework 2026 sets four outcomes that this strategy is designed to deliver: children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need; children and young people are safe in and outside their homes; children and young people are supported by their family network; and children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes. Ofsted's inspection framework for local authority children's services (ILACS) has been updated to reflect these reforms.

Family Help and child protection rest on clear statutory duties. The council must safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need (section 17 of the Children Act 1989) and make enquiries where a child may be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm (section 47). The council, the integrated care board and the police are the statutory safeguarding partners, who share responsibility for local arrangements to safeguard children, and the Children Act 2004 requires partners to co-operate to improve children's wellbeing. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 adds new duties, described below.

The national policy statement *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive* has helped shape this strategy by setting out a whole-system reform direction focused on keeping families together wherever it is safe to do so, strengthening family networks, improving multi-agency child protection, increasing the role of education in safeguarding, and improving information sharing so children receive help earlier.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 (Royal Assent 29 April 2026) provides the legislative foundation for the next phase of children's social care reform and reinforces the direction of this strategy.

Locally the strategy is consistent in its approach with the following policies.

- Council Priorities 2026–2030
- The High Five Children's Services Commitments,
- Best Start in Life Strategy 2026–2031
- Care Strategy 2025–2030
- SEND Reform Plan 2026–2029
- Youth Justice Strategy 2024–2029

4. Consultation and engagement

The strategy was co-produced over May to October 2026:

- Family Help Delivery Group from 21 May 2026 (health, education, SEND, domestic abuse, early years, voluntary sector and participation);
- Stakeholder event, and partner workshops on 15 July 2026 (police, health, housing, voluntary sector and a participation officer with lived experience) and 8 September 2026 (headteachers, Virtual School, SEND, Home-Start, CNWL and housing);
- Families First parents group 02 July 2026
- Written feedback on the first draft (police, Family Hubs, SEND Advisory Service, parents) and on the second draft (The Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, HDAAS, Best Start Family Hubs, SEND Advisory Service, Childcare).

Whilst the strategy has been co-produced with a broad range of partners and parents, the limited direct involvement of children, young people and some protected groups means there is a risk that specific barriers to accessing Family Help may not yet be fully understood. Ongoing engagement with children and young people, disabled children, LGBTQ+ young people, fathers, carers and families from minority ethnic and faith communities will be essential to ensure services remain responsive and inclusive.

We will engage the Children in Care Councils (Talkers, Step Up, Stepping Out), the Youth Council, Aim High and community groups on child-friendly and parent-friendly versions, and through each annual review.

4. The aims of the Strategy are to:

- Help every child in Hillingdon grow up safe, happy, healthy, loved and able to thrive, supported by strong families and connected communities.
- Give families help early, from professionals they know and trust, before problems escalate, through one front door, one assessment and one plan, so that families tell their story only once.
- Keep children safely within their families and wider networks wherever possible, through Family Group Decision Making (Stronger Together) and Family Network Support Packages.
- Strengthen the multi-agency response to children at risk of significant harm, inside and outside the home, through the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team.
- Ensure children's voices are central to every plan.
- Provide Locality-based help in trusted places, with voluntary and faith partners, reducing stigma and builds trust in services.
- Set out what every partner will do differently, with shared outcomes and measures, and report progress each year.
- Embed culturally responsive, family-led planning alongside father-inclusive practice
- Provide support for separated parents and promote positive co-parenting
- Undertake whole-family assessment identifying family's vulnerabilities and

ensure appropriate support.

- Promotes family life (Article 8), protection from harm (Article 3), fair process and advocacy (Article 6), and children's right to be heard (UNCRC Article 12).

5. The intended benefits of the Strategy are for:

- **Children and families:** earlier, more joined-up and less stigmatising help, closer to home; fewer hand-offs between services; families involved in decisions about their lives.
- **Partners:** a shared practice framework (STARS), clear roles and commitments, and better information sharing.
- **The council and residents:** fewer children needing statutory intervention or care; delivery of the Council Priorities 2026–2030 (particularly Putting our residents first, Future generations and Easy to deal with) and the High Five Children's Services Commitments; and the statutory Families First requirements in place by March 2027.

6. Equality profiles

The people who will benefit from the Strategy are children and young people aged 0 to 18 (up to 25 for young people with SEND) and their parents, carers and wider family networks, where needs go beyond what universal services can meet.

This includes expectant parents, children in need, children at risk of significant harm inside or outside the home, and families stepping down from statutory services.

The relevant equality profiles are presented below and are taken from the following sources:

ONS Census 2021;
Family Help Strategy 2026–2031;
Care Strategy 2025–2030;
Youth Justice Strategy 2024–2029 and Plan 2025–26;
Best Start in Life Strategy 2026–2031;
SEND Reform Plan 2026–2029;
Children's Services self-evaluation (September 2026).
ChAT data 30 September 2026

Table 1: Hillingdon residents

Characteristic	Hillingdon Census 2021 for total Hillingdon population (unless otherwise stated)
Total population	305,900 (Census 2021) 329,185 in the latest estimate used in the strategy
Age Children aged 0-19	Approximately 24,371 children aged 0–5 in the borough 26% of residents are aged 0–19



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	<p>0–4: 6.5%</p> <p>5–9: 6.7%</p> <p>10–15: 7.7%</p> <p>16–19: 4.9%</p>
Ethnicity	<p>Total population</p> <p>White 48.2%</p> <p>Asian 33.3%</p> <p>Black 7.8%</p> <p>Mixed 4.4%</p> <p>Other 6.3%</p> <p>10 to 17-year-olds: 62% are from Black, Asian, Mixed or Other ethnic backgrounds.</p>
Religion or belief	<p>Total population:</p> <p>Christian 39%</p> <p>Muslim 14.4%</p> <p>Hindu 10.8%</p> <p>Sikh 8.6%</p> <p>no religion 19.4%</p>
Disability	<p>14.7% declared a disability under the Equality Act (limited a lot 6.5%; limited a little 8.2%; age-standardised)</p>
Carers	<p>8.4% of residents aged 5+ provide unpaid care</p> <p>4.3% provide 20 or more hours a week</p>
Sexual orientation	<p>2.2% (5,378) identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another sexual orientation</p>
Gender reassignment	<p>0.9% (2,117) have a gender identity different from the sex registered at birth</p>
Marriage and civil partnership	<p>Aged 16+</p> <p>48.7% married or in a civil partnership;</p> <p>2.0% separated;</p> <p>7.1% divorced or dissolved</p>
Language	<p>107 languages spoken;</p> <p>22.1% of families speak a language other than English at home</p>
Socio-economic status	<p>About one in five children (around 25,300) live in poverty;</p> <p>Hillingdon is among the 36% most deprived local authorities;</p>

	440 homeless households with dependent children in 2025 (32.4% of households in temporary accommodation)
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Table 2: Children and families known to services

The data below provides some analysis of children known to family help services as of 30 September 2026. Data drawn from ChAT report 30.09.2026 unless otherwise stated

Group	Profile
	<i>Data drawn from ChAT report 30.09.2026 unless otherwise stated</i>
Children in Need	<p>Main reasons for involvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abuse or neglect 48% Family in acute stress 20% Child disability or illness 11% Absent parenting 9% Family dysfunction 8% Socially unacceptable behaviour 2% Parental disability or illness 1%
Child protection plans	<p>Latest category of abuse for CP plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neglect 48% Emotional abuse, 44% Physical abuse 5% Sexual abuse 2% Multiple categories 1%
Children in Need	<p>Ethnicity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> White 35% Mixed 11% Asian or Asian British 20% Black or black British 16% Other ethnic group 11% Not stated 8%
Youth justice	<p>Black children made up 27% of police stop and searches of children, against 13% of the population (2023/24); 89% of the 2024/25 youth justice cohort were boys.</p>
SEND	<p>3,503 children with an EHC plan (2023/24), rising by approx. 11.6% a year; Approximately 12% Hillingdon pupils require SEND support. Speech, language and communication needs are the most common primary need (32%); Only 33% of children with SEND reach a Good Level of</p>

	Development.
Early years	58.1% of children eligible for free school meals achieved a Good Level of Development, against 71.2% of all children (2024/25)
Family Hubs (2025/26)	11,974 families engaged with Family Hub support. 48% of attendances were from priority-need families, who make up 34% of registrations

7. Equality considerations and analysis

Overall, the strategy is designed to **improve access to early, joined-up help for all children and families**. The analysis below sets out, for each group, how family help will mitigate identified vulnerabilities associated with their particular circumstances.

Characteristic	
Age	<p>Children are the main beneficiaries of this strategy. National evidence, reflected in the Families First guide, shows babies at home and teenagers outside the home are at highest risk of serious harm. The strategy responds through New Beginnings (pre-birth), the MACPT and the harm outside the home pathway.</p> <p>In addition to this the strategy sets out transitional safeguarding through the AXIS 18–24 pilot and for children with SEND aged up to 25 with support from Preparation for Adulthood Service</p>
Sex	<p>Boys are over-represented in youth justice (89%) and among unaccompanied children.</p> <p>Domestic abuse drives 43% of child protection plans; national evidence shows most victims are women, who risk being held responsible for 'failing to protect'.</p> <p>Fathers and male carers are often less involved in plans. Girls are disproportionately affected by child sexual exploitation (national evidence).</p> <p>The strategy promotes a father-inclusive practice, involving both parents where safe. Where domestic abuse is a factor the Family Help Domestic Abuse Practice Checklist and Guidance and evidence based DASH risk assessment tool will be utilised to ensure unbiased risk assessment.</p>
Disability	<p>Disabled children and disabled parents may face communication and access barriers. The strategy aligns the Children with Disabilities service with Family Help and</p>



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	<p>links Family Help with Family Hubs as the SEND front door. Communication needs will be considered in every assessment.</p> <p>The strategy states it does not affect any child's right to an EHC needs assessment.</p>
Race and ethnicity	<p>Some families from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities may have lower levels of trust in statutory services based on previous experiences. The locality model, Family Hubs, Family Group Decision Making and partnership working with community and faith organisations are intended to strengthen engagement and improve confidence in services. Regular monitoring of outcomes by ethnicity will be used to identify and address any disproportionate outcomes."</p> <p>New pathways such as the MACPT and the harm outside the home pathway the strategy seeks to minimise the disproportionality and adultification experienced by some children.</p> <p>Reporting of ethnicity at each stage (Family Help, child protection, cared for) will enable consideration of disproportionality, embedding of anti-racist practice and GGRRAACCEEESSS model through the workforce development plan.</p>
Language	<p>People with limited English will be supported by interpreters at assessments, Family Group Decision Making and child protection meetings. Key information can be translated into alternative language. Reports, assessments, plans and letters will use plain English plans; parent-friendly and easy-read language. Widgets or other alternative forms of communication will be utilised where required.</p>
Sexual orientation and gender reassignment (LGBTQ+ children and parents)	<p>2.2% of residents are LGB+ and 0.9% have a gender identity different from their sex at birth. National evidence shows LGBTQ+ young people face higher risks of homelessness and poor mental health. The service does not routinely record data regarding sexual orientation and gender reassignment however all support provided to families is responsive to their individual and holistic needs.</p> <p>In addition we will seek LGBTQ+ young people's views through established participation groups.</p>



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Religion or belief	<p>Potential impact: practice that is not culturally responsive, or mistrust between faith communities and statutory services.</p> <p>Actions: culturally responsive Family Group Decision Making; partnerships with faith groups; training on harms such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse.</p>
Pregnancy and maternity	<p>Expectant parents are a priority group who are supported through the New Beginnings service.</p>
Socio-economic status	<p>The Families First guide warns practitioners to distinguish poverty from neglect.</p> <p>The strategy recognises that poverty can increase family stress and vulnerability but should not be conflated with neglect. Practitioners will be expected to distinguish between the impact of deprivation and parental capacity, ensuring that families receive practical support and are not disadvantaged because of their socio-economic circumstances.</p> <p>Some families, including those with No Resource to public funds may experience barriers due to limited digital access, digital literacy or language needs. Services will continue to provide face-to-face options through Family Hubs, locality provision, outreach services and community settings to prevent exclusion.</p>
Carers	<p>Young carers (including siblings), parent carers of disabled children and kinship carers all rely on Family Help support and recognition of their caring role. Family Network Support Packages and the kinship local offer directly support family carers to access support.</p>
Disability and SEND (children and parents)	<p>The strategy states it does not affect any child's right to an EHC needs assessment. The strategy aligns Children with Disabilities service with Family Help ensuring families and children with additional vulnerabilities receive the same level and threshold of support.</p> <p>Consideration will also be given to parents and carers with physical, sensory, cognitive or mental health disabilities to ensure assessments, meetings and information are accessible and reasonable adjustments are made where required.</p>
Marriage and civil partnership	<p>Support will be provided to both parents and wider family members, ensuring that a child receives a joined-up. Support will be provided through the parenting apart approach to support co-parenting.</p>



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Community safety and cohesion	<p>The locality model, Family Hubs, faith and voluntary partners, and work to reduce fear of 'social services' should strengthen trust between communities and services.</p> <p>Hillingdon's mobile population, linked to Heathrow, makes continuity of support more challenging.</p>
Care experienced children and care leavers	<p>Whilst not a protected characteristic, this is a recognised vulnerable group within the strategy.</p>

Intersectionality

Some children face several disadvantages at once.

Examples include:

- Black boys with communication needs, who are over-represented in youth justice;
- disabled children living in poverty;
- women experiencing domestic abuse who have no recourse to public funds;
- LGBTQ+ young people from faith communities;
- unaccompanied boys at risk of exploitation.

The strategy's whole-family assessment and plan is designed to see these needs together.

8. Human rights

The strategy supports the right to respect for family life (Article 8) by keeping families together wherever safe. Child protection intervention must remain lawful, necessary and proportionate.

The strategy supports protection from inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3) and fair process (Article 6) through information, advice and advocacy for parents in child protection

The strategy seeks to ensure children and young people are supported to participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lives, recognising Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a core principle underpinning Family Help practice.

Information sharing will be lawful, necessary and proportionate under the information-sharing protocols.

Support to children and young people is provided on a consent basis except where there are child protection concerns. (Article 8).

Conclusions

The Family Help Strategy 2026–2031 is expected to have a positive impact on children and families across all protected characteristics and additional vulnerabilities. It makes help easier to reach, earlier and less stigmatising; keeps children safely with their families wherever possible; and strengthens protection from harm inside and outside the home.

Particular attention will be required to ensure that outcomes for Black and minority ethnic children, disabled children, children with SEND, LGBTQ+ young people, young carers, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and families experiencing poverty are monitored through the annual review process. The collection and analysis of equality data will enable the council and partnership to identify and address any emerging disproportionality or barriers to access.

This analysis will be reviewed every year alongside the strategy's annual review, and whenever a significant change to services is proposed.

Action plan

Action	Lead	By when
Update reporting to include disability/SEND, language and, where recorded, religion) of all children and parents in Family Help, child protection and care	Business Intelligence; Assistant Director – Family Help	First report Q4 2026/27; published in the annual review, October 2027
Include anti-racist practice, GRRRAAACCEEESSS, poverty and neglect, LGBTQ+ inclusion and father-inclusive practice in the workforce development plan; audit decisions for bias	Principal Social Worker; workforce development	2026/27
Provide interpreting; translate key information; publish parent-friendly, child-friendly and easy-read versions of the strategy	Communications; Family Help	On publication of the strategy
Engage children and young people (Children in Care Councils, Youth Council, Aim High) and seldom-heard groups (fathers, LGBTQ+ young people, NRPF families, faith and ethnic communities)	Participation and Co-production Team	Before the first annual review
Develop transitional safeguarding for young adults aged 18 to 25 as part of the adolescent services review	Adolescent services; Transition to Adulthood team	In line with the Phase 4 review
Review this assessment with the strategy's annual review	Assistant Director – Family Help	October 2027, then annually

Signed and dated:

Name and position: Valentin Danciu, Assistant Director – Family Help, London Borough of Hillingdon