Classification: Open	Decision Type: Key

Report to:	Cabinet	**Date:** 04 November 2026
Subject:	Family Safeguarding Partnership Agreement	
Report of	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People	

Summary

1. This report seeks Cabinet approval for the continuation of funding to support the Family Safeguarding Model of Practice through renewed partnership arrangements with key safeguarding partners.

2. The Family Safeguarding Model, developed by the Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice in Hertfordshire, is a nationally recognised, evidence-informed approach which brings together social workers and specialist practitioners in domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse into integrated multi-disciplinary teams. The model is designed to address the underlying causes of harm, strengthen family resilience and safely reduce the need for children to enter care.

3. Since implementation in Bury in 2023, Family Safeguarding has become the foundation of practice across children's social care and has demonstrated positive outcomes for children and families. The model also provides a strong platform for implementation of the national Families First Partnership Programme reforms.

4. Approval from Cabinet is required as the original agreement and subsequent deed of variation have now expired, therefore a new agreement is required to continue to fund the additional practitioner roles which are required to ensure fidelity to the Family Safeguarding model.

Recommendation(s)

5. Cabinet to approve that a new Family Safeguarding partnership agreement is drawn up between Bury Council and our safeguarding partners, specifically GM Integrated Care Board, Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust, Probation Service, Early Break and Greater Manchester Police.

6. Cabinet to agree to continued partnership funding for a further 12 months at a cost of £490,618, funded from Supporting Families reserves.

Reasons for recommendation(s)

7. Since its implementation in 2023, the Family Safeguarding model of practice has supported children and families across Bury through multi-agency teams delivering support and intervention. These teams include social workers and child and family practitioners employed directly by Bury Council, as well as partner roles including mental health practitioners, drug and alcohol recovery workers, domestic abuse offers, domestic abuse practitioners and a clinical psychologist who are employed by our partners in NHS, Early Break and Probation.

8. These roles are required to continue to ensure continued fidelity to the Family Safeguarding model of practice. The number of practitioners in each role is based on a needs analysis that was completed alongside as part of the original implementation and planning which was supported by the Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice.

9. When looking at the impact of Family Safeguarding since its implementation, data is now beginning to show improved outcomes for children and families in Bury, which are being sustained across 6, 12 and 18-month periods following referral. This is resulting in lower levels of escalation through the system and lower numbers of children and young people entering the care of the local authority. Alongside the statistics, feedback from families shows the value of this model of practice and the benefits of offering a multi-agency approach to support, help and protection, addressing the needs of the family in a holistic, strengths-based way.

10. This is particularly pertinent as we move into implementing the national Families First Partnership Programme of reforms to social care, expanding our use of Family Safeguarding to create a seamless offer of support for families. The FFP model is designed so that family help is delivered by professionals (not all of whom are social qualified) and taking a whole family approach, working to address the issues facing the adults in the family and so is a good fit for the Family Safeguarding model.

11. **Alternative options considered and rejected**

12. Option 1 - Discontinue funding to partners

This would result in a loss of the multi-agency practitioners within the service and mean that Bury is no longer a Family Safeguarding authority. This was a key strand of the Council's Improvement Plan following the inadequate Ofsted inspection of 2021, and supported by the DfE under sector led improvement partner (SLIP) arrangements. This option risks losing the benefits achieved through the multi-disciplinary approach, resulting in poorer outcomes for children and families. This may also result in increased demand on statutory intervention including children subject to child protection plans and children entering care. This is inconsistent with the council's objective to offer the right

level of support for children and families at the right time, in the most cost effective way. It would also remove the basis on which the Families First Programme implementation has been founded, which assumes a Family Safeguarding model of practice in its locality structures.

13. *Option 2 - Reduce funding levels*

Reducing funding would result in fewer practitioners available to support families. The number of practitioners in place was originally set by the Centre for Family Safeguarding who designed the model and considered the number of children open to social care at different levels of intervention. Reducing the number of practitioners would mean we no longer have fidelity with the Family Safeguarding model. The model of practice is based on families being able to access the support directly, without having to go on multiple pathways and referral routes.

Report Author and Contact Details:

Name: Beth Speak
Position: Children's Improvement Manager
Department: Children & Young People Dept
E-mail: b.speak@bury.gov.uk

Background

14. The Family Safeguarding model has supported a decline in the number of children entering care. Over the past 12 months (to end of September 2026), 108 children entered care, compared to 154 for the 12 months to end of September 2025. More particularly over the same 12-month period to the end of September 2026, the number of children aged between 1 and 9 years old entering care has reduced to 27 children. This compares with 68 for the 12 months to the end of September 2025 and an average of 34 for the 4 years prior to that date.

15. As part of the ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of Family Safeguarding, we have also been undertaking longitudinal analysis looking at children worked with by Family Safeguarding teams at a snapshot date and what support or intervention a child or family were receiving 12 and 18 months hence. This shows increasing effectiveness in the support provided by the service, with less escalation in need – for instance only 10% of children supported at the end of March 2025 had seen an escalation in need as at the end of September 2026; and only 7% of children had entered public care. Both figures have improved from the same analysis undertaken at the end of September 2025, for the cohort of children open to the service at the end of March 2024 (13% escalating and 8% entering care).

16. While the percentage differences may not seem large, it is worth considering that 1% equates to 6 children and that each child in care costs an average of £45,000 a year to support, if they are in foster care. So small differences make a substantial financial difference. Moreover, a sustained period of lower entry into care, such as has occurred in 2026, can yield to substantial cost avoidance for the council. The difference of 45 children entering care in the 12 months to the end of September 2026, compared to the 12 months to the end of September 2025, equates to £2m less pressure on council budgets for homes for children in care, if all those additional children lived in foster homes.

17. Evidence of impact of the model on the wider practice of the council's Children's Services, outside of the Family Safeguarding Teams is more mixed, with continued relatively high numbers of child protection enquiries and child protection plans compared to similar authorities – though the latter have fallen by 7% over the past year. This activity is chiefly driven from new work opening to the service, rather than families already open, but reducing these volumes will be one of the key objectives of implementation of the national Family Help reforms. Similarly, Bury has not seen impact on the number of requests for help received by the service from partners, so the concept of meeting need at the lowest possible level of intervention has not truly embedded across the wider partnership of local agencies yet.

18. In March 2026, the Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice returned to Bury as part of sector led improvement arrangements to carry out a Peer Review which identified a clear trajectory of improvement, increased workforce stability, stronger leadership and a strong commitment to Family Safeguarding. Reviewers found evidence of improved outcomes for children and families, including fewer children entering care, reductions in child protection activity and more children being supported successfully within their families. Whilst identifying areas for further development, the review's recommendations focused on strengthening and embedding the model rather than changing direction. The findings provide independent assurance that continued investment in Family Safeguarding represents an effective and evidence-informed approach to improving outcomes for children and supporting the delivery of national children's social care reform.

19. The review was specifically commissioned to assess implementation of the model, evaluate practice quality and impact, review leadership, workforce and partnership working, and identify priorities for further development

20. The peer reviewers identified a number of significant strengths:
    - Clear evidence of relational and strengths-based practice.
    - Positive multi-agency contributions to safeguarding processes.
    - Improved information sharing and decision-making at the front door.
    - Generally appropriate application of thresholds.
    - Evidence of plans being co-produced with families.

- Positive feedback from families receiving support.
- Effective quality assurance arrangements and learning mechanisms.
- Strong performance reporting and oversight arrangements.

21. Importantly, reviewers found evidence that the model was contributing to improved outcomes for children and families, including:
    - Fewer children entering care.
    - More children successfully exiting care.
    - Reduced child protection and referral rates.
    - More children being supported safely within Early Help and Child in Need services.
    - Positive family experiences of support and intervention

22. Continuation of the Family Safeguarding model is critical to the successful implementation of the nationally mandated Families First Partnership Programme (FFPP). Family Safeguarding already delivers many of the core principles underpinning the reforms, including whole-family working, relationship-based practice, multi-disciplinary support, shared decision-making and a focus on helping children remain safely within their family networks wherever possible. The FFPP reforms are not intended to replace Family Safeguarding; rather, they build upon and expand approaches that have already been proven to improve outcomes for children and families. Continued investment in Family Safeguarding will therefore protect the progress already achieved, maintain the multi-disciplinary capacity that is fundamental to the model, and provide a strong foundation from which Bury can deliver the Families First reforms and meet national expectations for integrated Family Help, effective multi-agency child protection and family-led support.

23. Children's services are mostly involved with children and families because of parental issues. Parental issues were identified in two-thirds of the 1,400 assessments of newly opening children completed in 2026 to date, with 50% containing issues around parental mental health (32%), Domestic Abuse (29%), Alcohol abuse (19%) or Substance Misuse (13%).

24. For this reason, there are Domestic Abuse advisers in the MASSH itself – to enable early support; but this is also the principle reason for the Family Safeguarding model of practice. The model recognises that a family's problems need to be addressed holistically and in most instances this means parental issues. Further, it also recognises that the adults caring for children will often not meet the threshold for adult services (with criticality of need being used to ration provision, together with willingness to engage).

25. The Family Safeguarding model therefore seeks to circumvent the system by having adult service providers as part of the team working with the family. It is instructive that the national social care reforms around Family Help seek to mirror this approach.

26. Family Safeguarding is prevention in action – enabling access to services for adults in the family that would not otherwise be available to them to better support their parenting of children within the family and to reduce the likelihood of greater children's social care involvement and entry into care by the children concerned.

27. Breakdown of the £490,618:

Pennine Care Trust (Mental Health Practitioners)	£193,929
Early Break (Substance Recovery Workers)	£147,186
Probation Service (Domestic Abuse Officers)	£149,503
Total	**£490,618**

Sustainability

28. The continuation of a funded partnership agreement for a further 12 months will give space to focus on moving from implementation to long-term sustainability, ensuring that the model becomes embedded as the established way in which the partnership works with children and families. Sustainability requires continued access to the multi-disciplinary expertise which is fundamental to the model, alongside maintaining the practice approach, workforce capability, partnership ownership and governance arrangements that support delivery.

29. This will require the Council and its partners to consider how the multidisciplinary capacity and ways of working that are fundamental to the model can be maintained within the wider system over the longer term. A particular focus will be on strengthening relationships and alignment with Adult Social Care, developing stronger links with neighbourhood-based services and ensuring that opportunities for greater integration are fully explored. This is important in sustaining a whole-family approach, recognising that many of the issues affecting children are closely connected to the needs and circumstances of the adults within their family.

30. Over the next 12 months, the Families First Partnership governance arrangements will provide the framework for this work. Three-monthly reviews will consider the impact, effectiveness and longer-term sustainability of Family Safeguarding, bringing partners back together to consider their respective roles, responsibilities and contribution to the future model. This will include consideration of the scope for continued or revised partnership funding alongside opportunities to achieve greater integration with Adult Social Care, neighbourhood arrangements and the developing Families First model. The intention is to ensure that Family Safeguarding moves from a time-limited implementation programme to an embedded, jointly owned and sustainable

partnership approach, while protecting the core multi-disciplinary features that have supported improved outcomes for children and families.

Links with the Corporate Priorities:

Please summarise how this links to the Let's Do It Strategy.

31. The Family Safeguarding Model directly supports the Let's Do It strategy by delivering services that are Local, Enterprise, Together and Strength-Based.

32. The model brings professionals together around families promoting shared responsibility between agencies and families, recognises the strengths and capabilities within family networks and focuses on building sustainable change rather than dependency on services.

33. Family Safeguarding also contributes to Bury's ambition to improve life chances, reduce inequalities and ensure children grow up safe, healthy and connected to their families and communities. The continued investment in multi-disciplinary working supports earlier intervention, prevention and better outcomes for children and young people.

34. In addition, Family Safeguarding provides a strong foundation for implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme by aligning closely with national reforms that seek to strengthen family help, multi-agency child protection and family-led decision-making

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Equality Impact and Considerations:

Please provide an explanation of the outcome(s) of an initial or full EIA and make ***specific reference regarding the protected characteristic of Looked After Children****. There must be a signed off EIA template appended with a full analysis or explanation as to why an analysis is not needed for the report to be put forward to Cabinet. Sign off to be completed by the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Manager (contact l.cawley@bury.gov.uk for advice).*

35. The Family Safeguarding model positively impacts on children, young people and families by improving access to co-ordinated support and reducing inequalities experienced by vulnerable groups. Particular consideration has been given to looked after children and those at risk of entering care.

Environmental Impact and Considerations:

*Please provide an explanation of the Environmental impact of this decision. Please include the impact on both **Carbon emissions** (contact climate@bury.gov.uk for advice) and **Biodiversity** (contact S.Tinsley@bury.gov.uk and Dennis.whittle@bury.gov.uk for advice)*

36.

Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation

Procurement Implications:

37. There are no procurement implications

Legal Implications:

38. The Council has statutory duties under the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The proposed Family Safeguarding Partnership supports the delivery of those functions through multi-agency working and early intervention.

39. Cabinet is requested to approve the continuation of funding and the entering into of a new partnership agreement with safeguarding partners. The agreement should clearly set out governance arrangements, funding commitments, information sharing requirements, performance monitoring, liability and termination provisions. Appropriate data sharing arrangements must be in place to ensure compliance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.

40. Subject to the agreement being completed in a form approved by Legal Services, there are no legal impediments to Cabinet approving the recommendations.

Financial Implications:

41. The cost of the 12 month extension is estimated to be £490,618, as outlined in the report, and can be funded from the Supporting Families reserve. There is no recurrent revenue budget for the service built into the MTFS and a report will need to be brought back to Cabinet should any additional funding be required at the end of the extension period.

Appendices:

Please list any appended documents (please save these as clearly labelled separate documents in the Teams folder).

Background papers:

Please list any background documents to this report and include a hyperlink where possible.

A Guide to Family Safeguarding:
https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/business/services-for-businesses-charities-and-other-public-bodies/centre-for-family-safeguarding-practice/family-safeguarding-model-guide.pdf#

Family Safeguarding Evaluation Report (July 2020) – independent evaluation commissioned by the DfE:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/932367/Hertfordshire_Family_Safeguarding.pdf

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning
DfE	Department for Education
FFPP	Families First Partnership Programme