

[News story: New projects to strengthen families and keep children out of care](#)

Children in and on the edge of care will benefit from £84 million of new investment for projects designed to strengthen and support families – marking the 30th anniversary of the Children Act by reaffirming its core principle that, where possible, children are best brought up with their parents.

Up to 20 councils will receive funding to help improve their practice, supporting families to stay together wherever appropriate, so that fewer children need to be taken into care and giving them the best chance to succeed in life.

Three ‘early adopters’ have been unveiled to deliver one of three landmark projects originally run through the Department for Education’s Innovation Programme: Darlington, Cambridgeshire and Middlesbrough.

The launch of the government’s Strengthening Families, Protecting Children [programme](#) will start work to roll out the three successful projects to other eligible councils, where there are persistently high numbers of children being taken into care.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Every child deserves to grow up in a stable, loving family and go through life confident that someone always has your back. But for too many children, this is simply not a reality. With the number of children in care rising, many of these children face a far starker version of reality, one where their parents are in the grips of their own nightmare, through mental health problems, the trauma of domestic violence or an addiction.

We must assist those parents facing difficulties and work with them to strengthen their family relationships so they can properly support their children. In the year that sees the 30th anniversary of the Children’s Act, we must stay true to its heart – that where possible and safe, children are best brought up, loved and supported by their parents.

As a government, we want to strengthen families so that, wherever possible, they stay together and provide their children with a safe and stable home life. As Education Secretary, it’s my job to make sure what works to keep families together and change lives, is available to more children and families in need.

The projects were originally developed by Leeds, Hertfordshire and North Yorkshire councils – all rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted. They aim to build resilience among more vulnerable families and improve how councils

design and run services. They also support social workers to confidently identify where families can stay together in the home safely, without putting children or partners at risk.

The three projects being introduced in 20 new areas are:

- [Leeds Family Valued](#): working with the whole family unit and any support network to encourage long term changes at home that keep children safe, working with families rather than imposing measures on them. Independent evaluation of the project's impact on the target population shows that between 2011 and 2017, Leeds reduced the number of children on children's services Protection Plans by nearly 50% (974 in 2011 down to 515 in 2017).
- [Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding](#): creates teams consisting of mental health practitioners, domestic abuse workers, probation officers and children's social workers to strengthen the bond between couples, support fathers and male partners to prevent violent behaviour. Evaluation shows this resulted in a 39% reduction in the number of days children spent in care, for cases allocated to the safeguarding team, a 53% drop in hospital admissions for adults in that family, and a 66% reduction in contact with the police.
- [North Yorkshire No Wrong Door](#): creates 'hubs' where young people at risk of going into care get targeted support to cope with the multiple issues they face, including lack of accommodation or contact with the police. Independent evaluation showed the programme saw a 38% fall in arrests of individuals involved during the first 18 months of the programme and a 57% reduction in A&E visits.

Jenny Coles, Director of Children's Services at Hertfordshire County Council, said:

This enlightened approach has helped so many families in Hertfordshire. I'm proud of what the safeguarding team has achieved and the difference they are continuing to make for children in our county by turning accepted practice on its head and managing safeguarding in a totally different way.

The success of this innovative project is down to the partnership approach we have taken to implement this new way of working across such a large geographical area and the individuals working in the safeguarding team, whose enthusiasm has driven this ambitious project.

I am pleased our model has been recognised by government and we look forward to working with other councils to share our learning and help implement the family safeguarding approach to achieve positive outcomes for children across the country.

Steve Walker, Director of Children and Families at Leeds City Council, said:

Leeds Children and Families services are excited to be part of the Strengthening Families programme. We are keen to work with colleagues in other authorities to improve outcomes for children. We are looking forward to sharing the approach we've developed in making Leeds a Child Friendly City – using restorative practice to change the way we work with children and families, supporting social workers to develop excellent practice and creating new services to reduce the impact of domestic violence.

Outcomes for children in care are poor compared with their peers. They are half as likely to meet the expected standards at age 11 and are a quarter as likely to achieve good GCSEs. Into adulthood they continue to have poor outcomes: 39% of all care leavers are “not in education, employment or training” against 12% of their peers, and are five times more likely to experience the criminal justice system.

The new drive will help avoid taking children into care when they can be kept safely with their family, while the department continues to raise the bar in helping young people in by recruiting the next generation of talented social workers and providing a spectrum of support to care leavers.

The first three local authorities to benefit from this programme – Darlington, Cambridgeshire and Middlesbrough – have started discussions and are due to start work soon. Eligible councils must meet a core criteria of being rated ‘requires improvement’ by Ofsted and having either high or rising rates of children in care over the last three years.

Cllr Simon Bywater, Chairman of Cambridgeshire County Council’s Children and Young People’s Committee said:

This is incredibly exciting news that will make a real difference to the lives of our most vulnerable children and mean that – when it is in their best interests – more children can stay safely at home. We know that this approach will work as it has been successfully rolled out in neighbouring Peterborough and will put children’s services in Cambridgeshire at the forefront of innovation and best practice.

Suzanne Joyner, Darlington Borough Council’s Director of Children and Adult’s Services, said:

We’re thrilled to be one of the early adopters in the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme. I’ve been impressed with the impact of the Family Valued project in Leeds and look forward to seeing it make a positive difference to the lives of families and children in Darlington.

Helen Watson, Middlesbrough Council’s Executive Director of Children’s

Services, said:

Ensuring children have the best possible start in life is one of our key priorities, and central to that is keeping families together wherever possible.

The right sort of support and timely intervention can prevent the need for children coming into care, and that brings with it enormous long-term benefits.

This welcome project will help us further develop and strengthen our approach, and will undoubtedly change lives for the better.