



Department  
for Education

# **The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide**

**Delivery expectations for safeguarding  
partners in England**

**March 2025**

# Contents

<b>Table of figures</b>	<b>4</b>
Ministerial foreword	5
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
About this guide	7
How this guide should be used	8
Who is this guide for?	8
Investment to support local areas	9
The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill	9
Learning and accountability	10
<b>Chapter 1: A transformation in family support</b>	<b>12</b>
Vision for Family Help and multi-agency child protection	13
Interaction with universal services and community based early help	14
Education and childcare settings and attendance	14
Keeping families together – Reunification and Family Group Decision Making	15
<b>Chapter 2: Delivery expectations</b>	<b>16</b>
Section 1: Family Help	16
Identifying need for Family Help	16
A Seamless Offer of Family Help: Targeted Early Help and Child in Need	18
Family Help Lead Practitioner	19
Multi-disciplinary Family Help Teams	23
Family Help Assessment and Plans	24
Front Door Arrangements	26
Section 2: Multi-agency Child Protection	28
A Seamless System of Help, Support and Protection	28
Establishing Multi-agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs)	29
Functions of the Multi-agency Child Protection Teams	31
Embedding the Lead Child Protection Practitioner Role	33
Responding to Local Needs and Harms	33
Responding to Significant Harm Outside the Home	34
Information, Support and Advice for Parents and Carers	36
Section 3: Family Group Decision Making	37

Embedding Family Group Decision Making across the system of help, support and protection	38
Implementing Family Group Decision Making	39
Family Group Decision Making and Safeguarding	42
Offering Family Group Decision Making at pre-proceedings	43
When Family Group Decision Making might not be offered at pre-proceedings	44
Withdrawing the offer of Family Group Decision Making at pre-proceedings	45
<b>Chapter 3: Families First Partnership Programme: key principles and system enablers</b>	<b>46</b>
The National Framework and Working Together to Safeguard Children	46
Information Sharing	46
Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements	48
Delivering evidence based interventions	49
<b>Chapter 4: Families First Partnership Programme – national delivery support offer</b>	<b>51</b>

**Table of figures**

Figure 1: Our vision for a reformed system.....12

## Ministerial foreword

Our government has set out its Plan for Change which includes working across government to ensure every child is kept safe so that everyone, regardless of their background or where they live across the country, has the opportunity to succeed. Keeping children safe from multiple forms of abuse and harm and tackling child poverty is the foundation of giving every child the best start in life, ensuring they can achieve and thrive as they grow up.

We appreciate the vital role local safeguarding partners – children’s social care, police and health – and relevant agencies, like education and childcare settings, play in helping families and ensuring all children receive the support and protection they need. Between us, we have decades of experience from social work and management to victim and survivor support, and working in local communities. Your unwavering dedication ensures these children receive the care and support they need to succeed. We are profoundly grateful for your tireless efforts in protecting children from different harms and supporting families to make a lasting difference in young people’s lives.

We know that you share our ambition to make sure that all children and families can receive the right help at the right time. But for too long you have had to fight the tide of increasing spend on statutory and acute services, at the expense of investment in preventative family support.

We are committed to rebalancing the children’s social care system and that is why we are rolling out the Families First Partnership programme – backed by over £500 million of funding in financial year 25/26, through the Local Government Finance Settlement. The publication of this programme guide confirms our expectations of safeguarding partners to implement reforms to Family Help, multi-agency child protection and Family Group Decision Making – building on a body of evidence of what we know works to support families to stay together and thrive, and ultimately reduce the number of looked after children, safely.

We envision a transformed system, where practitioners from social work, police, health, education, and beyond work together to promote the wellbeing of children and keep them safe from harm. We have no doubt that we will take this journey of change as a team – and that this requires us all to work together effectively, to enact and resource a multi-agency approach throughout the programme and the whole system reform it entails.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff across children’s social care, police, health, and education for your continued hard work and dedication, as well as the many committed carers across the country.

Together, we can transform the way we support families and vulnerable children by providing the right help at the right time, protecting them from harm and ensuring more

children can grow up safely, with the right love and support around them. Without you, none of this is possible.

Thank you,

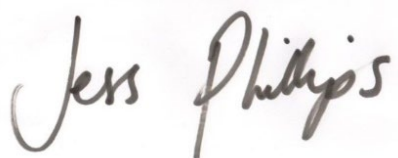
**Janet Daby MP:** Minister for Children and Families, Department for Education

A handwritten signature of Janet Daby in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and includes a period at the end.

**Ashley Dalton MP:** Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention, Department of Health and Social Care

A handwritten signature of Ashley Dalton in blue ink. The signature is written in a cursive style.

**Jess Phillips MP:** Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls, Home Office

A handwritten signature of Jess Phillips in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style.

# Introduction

The Families First Partnership (FFP) programme guide has been produced to support safeguarding partners<sup>1</sup> implement **Family Help and multi-agency child protection reforms and make greater use of Family Group Decision Making**. The rollout of these reforms represents a significant step forward in delivering on the government's mission to provide children with the best start in life and break down barriers to opportunity.

## About this guide

**This programme guide is not statutory guidance and does not replace existing statutory guidance, including:**

- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: statutory guidance](#) (referred to in this document as 'Working Together') is the multi-agency statutory guidance for every organisation, individual and agency who is involved in helping and supporting families and protecting children; or the
- [Children's social care: national framework - GOV.UK](#) (referred to in the document as the 'National Framework') which sets out the purpose, principles and enablers of good practice of children's social care and the outcomes that should be achieved.

This guide describes the programme vision and objectives, and sets out the practice change we expect to see to improve the support provided to children and their families. The following chapters set out:

- **Chapter 1:** vision for a transformation in family support, to rebalance the system away from crisis intervention and toward earlier help and support
- **Chapter 2:** delivery expectations for Family Help, multi-agency child protection and Family Group Decision Making
- **Chapter 3:** key principles and system enablers
- **Chapter 4:** national delivery support offer

In this guide, the term 'children and young people' refers to individuals up to the age of 25. This recognises that in law the term children refers to anyone up to the age of 18, and there are some young adults who will continue to receive support from children's social care as care leavers or through education, health and care plans, up to the age of 25.

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<sup>1</sup> A safeguarding partner in relation to a local authority area in England is defined in section 16E of the Children Act 2004 as: (a) the local authority, (b) an integrated care board for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area, and (c) the chief officer of police for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area.

## How this guide should be used

Reforming the children's social care system will take time. Changes to service structure, workforce roles, practice frameworks and oversight arrangements will require time to design and implement. Our expectation is that the next year (April 2025 to March 2026) will feature ongoing business as usual service delivery alongside transformation activity. It is crucial that reform is multi-agency and implemented effectively, with improving the safety and wellbeing of children at its heart.

This guide should be used by safeguarding partners and other relevant agencies and organisations within their local areas to begin planning for transformation activity and implementation. It will be followed by further implementation and 'how to' guides on specific aspects of reform as part of our ongoing delivery support offer. More detail about this support offer is provided in [Chapter 4](#).

The guide requires safeguarding partners to build on the foundations of what is already in place through the requirements of Working Together and the National Framework. It is clear about the expectations for reform, but it is not prescriptive, and safeguarding partners and other relevant agencies should co-design how it will work for them, based on their specific local context. This co-design activity should have the voices of children, young people and families at the heart of new service design. The guide builds on a range of well evidenced programmes that have been delivered in recent years – including the Supporting Families Programme and Strengthening Families Protecting Children. The aim is to embed a more consistent application of what works to achieve improved outcomes, whilst tailored to local areas' needs and the children and families living there.

## Who is this guide for?

This guide is for everyone who works with children, young people and their families including strategic leaders, senior and middle managers, and those in direct practice.

These reforms are underpinned by strong multi-agency working. Safeguarding partners through their local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, are foundational to success and improving outcomes for children, young people and families.

Multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working will be fundamental to the implementation of reforms:

- by multi-disciplinary working we mean: a range of practitioners and professionals from different backgrounds working together, to enable the best outcomes for children, young people and families;
- by multi-agency working we mean: working across organisations to meet children, young people and families' needs including effective information sharing, joint decision-making and co-ordinated interventions, to facilitate effective help, support and protection. This includes in child protection where individuals from different



agencies come together into a single team to deliver statutory child protection functions whilst remaining connected to their parent agency.

## Investment to support local areas

Over £500 million has been made available through the [Final local government finance settlement: England, 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#) (LGFS) to support local authorities working with their safeguarding partners to invest in transformation and expansion of preventative support in FY25-26. This will build on the extensive existing spend from local authority, partner and other agency budgets on preventative services.

This funding will be from two grants within the LGFS:

- **Children's Social Care Prevention Grant** - £270 million of new funding (to note this figure has now increased by £20 million from the announcement in the LGFS Policy Statement in November; £13 million of which is for family group decision making);
- **Children and Families Grant** - £253.5 million of mainstreamed funding originally for the Supporting Families programme.

These grants support the government's commitment to reform local government funding and will ensure local authorities, with their partners, are able to fund preventative support and services including targeted early help, child in need and child protection activity, marking a step-change to the way in which core funding is spent. [Grant Determination Letters](#) with expectations and conditions have been issued to local authorities for these grants. This includes an expectation that around 30% of the new funding will be spent on the costs of transformation and co-design, ensuring leaders have the capacity to undertake this important reform backed with funding. We recognise the actual percentage of funding spent on this phase of transformation will vary depending on the circumstances in each local area.

Over time, nationally, we are expecting a significant reduction in the numbers of looked after children as a result of this investment. To keep more families together, the savings made from these reduced placement costs will contribute to the rebalancing of the system. There is consensus across government and the statutory safeguarding partners that this change is necessary. Investing earlier in the system and before serious problems emerge brings greater efficacy and improves children's outcomes. The government is also committed to improving the availability of foster homes, reducing the use of residential care, using family strengths through kinship support and there are a series of work streams in place to support that ambition.

## The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill was introduced into Parliament on 17 December 2024. The bill is an important step towards delivering the government's

Opportunity Mission to break the link between background and future success. The following key policy changes outlined in this guide are included in the bill:

### **Family group decision making**

A measure to mandate local authorities to offer a ‘family group decision making’ meeting at the point the local authority is seriously considering applying to the court for a care or supervision order, to give all families an opportunity to come together and make a plan in response to concerns regarding the child’s welfare.

### **Multi-agency child protection teams**

A measure to create a duty for the statutory safeguarding partners (local authorities, police and health) to make arrangements to establish multi-agency child protection teams (MACPTs) to support the local authority in the discharge of its child protection duties; and require relevant agencies to enter memoranda to set out how they will facilitate the operation of the MACPT.

### **Strengthening the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements**

A measure to place duties on the statutory safeguarding partners (local authorities, police and health) to make education and childcare settings relevant agencies by default, thereby ensuring their participation in safeguarding in their area and that their views are included and represented at strategic and operational levels in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

### **Information sharing and consistent identifiers**

A measure to improve data sharing between agencies to better safeguard and support children and families. This will be enabled by the introduction of an information sharing duty that provides a clear legal basis to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promotion of welfare, and provision to enable the specification of a consistent identifier (also known as ‘Single Unique Identifier’).

More information on the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill can be found at [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill - policy summary notes](#)

### **Learning and accountability**

As the system embarks on these reforms, sharing learning and good practice across local partnerships will be key. This will include drawing on the experiences of the 10 funded [Families first for children \(FFC\) pathfinder](#) local partnerships, who have been testing these system reforms since July 2023. More information about the national delivery support offer can be found in [Chapter 4](#).

The grant conditions set out what local authorities should do to make use of the funding that has been made available, and the Department for Education, alongside the Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Care as appropriate, will work closely with local partnerships on the delivery of the Families First Partnership programme. If local authorities are found to not be delivering the programme in accordance with the grant conditions, the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government may reduce, suspend or withhold future grant payments or require the repayment of the whole or any part of the grant monies paid.

During this period of transformation, local areas will need to be mindful of making safe decisions to transition their services to deliver even better outcomes for children, young people and families. We would expect that all appropriate local governance is in place, and that the senior leaders that have responsibility for services understand and are involved in the changes that are being made. This is likely to involve both Chief Executives of local authorities, Lead Members for children, and Chief Executives of Integrated Care Boards and Chief Constables. At a practice level, areas will need to be confident that quality oversight and assurance processes are in place and that workforces are suitably engaged and supported to understand the changes in services. Practitioners should have access to information and advice that will support them to deliver their responsibilities towards children, young people and families, including through quality supervision.

Ofsted continues to have responsibility for inspecting local authority children's services under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services framework (ILACS). They have a crucial role in evaluating what is working well and what needs to improve in children's social care. Safeguarding partners are inspected by their respective inspectorate bodies (Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services) and jointly through Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs).

As reforms to children's social care are embedded, Ofsted will continue to rebalance inspection, ensuring it continues to act as a lever for improvement. Government is committed to replacing single headline grades in all remits that Ofsted inspects, including in children's social care. This will be done in consultation with the sector, alongside progressing reforms and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

# Chapter 1: A transformation in family support

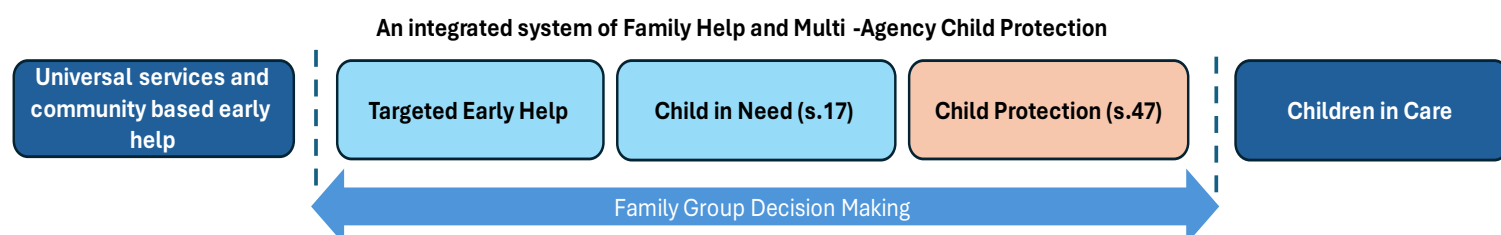
All families need support, whether from family or volunteers, private funded services (such as in-home childcare support or paid for therapeutic support) or publicly funded family support or social work. Families have diverse needs and circumstances. The aim of the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme is to transform the whole system of help, support and protection, to ensure that every family can access the right help and support when they need it, with a strong emphasis on early intervention to prevent crisis.

The Families First for Children Pathfinder programme has demonstrated that for safeguarding partners, effective transformation of family support means considering how services from universal to social care interventions interact as a connected system. Collaboration among all partners and relevant agencies, including voluntary and community sector organisations that work with children and adults, is essential to tailor approaches for diverse needs such as: disabilities, mental health issues, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, substance misuse, and harm outside the home including exploitation and online. Services should address the needs of children of all ages. And a whole family approach means that understanding the needs of the adults in the household is also important. In providing support, it is crucial that local areas understand and take account of the diverse backgrounds of families. Practice should be anti-discriminatory and address barriers to accessing services. Chapter 1 of the Working Together statutory guidance sets out this shared responsibility across agencies, including principles for working in partnership with parents and carers wherever this is possible.

For families, transformation through the FFP programme will mean a better way to access help. Instead of feeling like they simply don't know where to go, or being handed over between different teams, they will be able to connect with the right support, through an integrated and relationship focussed approach, that adapts to their needs.

The diagram in Figure 1 shows how different support and services can operate together to wrap help and support around families and adapt as needs change. The ambition is to maintain relationships in order to avoid children, young people and families telling their stories multiple times or being passed between teams or practitioners. The more seamless model facilitates dynamic and responsive assessment and planning, rather than a stop/start approach.

**Figure 1: Our vision for a reformed system**



## Vision for Family Help and multi-agency child protection

The FFP programme will support safeguarding partners to bring together targeted early help, child in need, and multi-agency child protection into a seamless system of help, support and protection. This includes services and workforces, such as family support workers, social workers and other specialist and alternatively qualified practitioners, coming together to support families. By targeted early help, child in need and child protection, we mean:

- **targeted early help:** children and families with multiple and/or complex needs that require a plan to be in place and a lead practitioner appointed;
- **children in Need (Section 17, Children Act 1989):** a general duty for local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need or are disabled, and promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs;
- **child protection (Section 47):** the duty on local authorities to investigate where they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

The reforms to Family Help and multi-agency child protection are fully interconnected. They support a fundamental rebalancing of the whole system, enabling support to be wrapped around families at the earliest opportunity, preventing escalation, and reducing the flow of families toward child protection investigations where this is possible. Where there are child protection concerns, the reformed system will be forensic and decisive, focused on protecting children from significant harm, inside and outside of the home, including online. Children will have different needs and vulnerabilities and, as such, the type of significant harm they experience and the context in which this happens will vary.

Our vision is a reformed system where Family Help Lead Practitioners (FHLPs), supported by expert multi-agency child protection teams (MACPTs) including social worker lead child protection practitioners (LCPPs), are responsible for and undertake direct child protection practice together with families where this is needed. When child protection concerns arise, FHLPs will maintain the relationship with the family and continue to coordinate the support and services for them. Where there are concerns about significant harm, the LCPP will take statutory child protection decisions with input from the wider (MACPT). The FHLP will remain involved in direct practice with the family throughout. There will be child protection expertise across the whole system of Family Help and multi-agency child protection, so effective action can be taken where concerns arise.

The Home Office are developing Prevention Partnerships. These will operate through Violence Reduction Units (VRUs). Although still in development, we would encourage engagement with VRUs and local youth justice governance to ensure alignment, keeping children, young people and families at the heart of the design, avoiding duplication or gaps in support.

## Interaction with universal services and community based early help

FFP programme funding should be used to support families with multiple and/or complex needs - covering targeted early help, child in need and child protection. But we recognise that universal services and community based early help, will continue to play a crucial role in identifying emerging problems and providing support at an early stage. This includes support delivered through family hubs, youth services, after school clubs and routine health and housing provision. Local areas should build on the strengths of their universal and community based early help delivery models and workforce when designing their approach to Family Help.

Voluntary and community services also continue to be a vital part of the end-to-end system. The contribution of community, faith and voluntary groups should be recognised and valued. This is particularly important for families and communities that may be wary of, or unaware of, the local services available to them.

Family Hubs, while focused on preventative services, can act as a non-stigmatising gateway to targeted whole-family support delivered through Family Help. Some of the Families First for Children pathfinders have integrated family hubs and Family Help to support delivery, for example using family hubs as the primary co-location space for multi-disciplinary Family Help teams. As a community-based model for providing early help to families, family hubs can play an important role in identifying families who may need more intensive support from Family Help and multi-agency child protection services, for example, those families where domestic abuse is a factor. For families who no longer require the support of targeted and specialist services, family hubs can offer an ongoing, local support network. Not every area has a family hub therefore other forms of community-based settings providing early help will play an important role in early identification of family need and appropriate referrals into targeted support.

## Education and childcare settings and attendance

Education and childcare settings will often have the strongest relationships with children, young people and their families and be the first to identify when help or protection is needed. Education and childcare settings may be able to offer support directly to families, connect them with other local services that provide more targeted support, have continued contact with a family to monitor progress or change, and know when to escalate to seek further input, intervention or oversight.

Education and childcare settings are vital in understanding underlying causes of absence which can be indicators or causes of other issues. Live attendance data is therefore one of the best early-warning indicators of need, particularly where pupils are absent more often than they attend. Alongside expectations in statutory [attendance guidance](#), partnerships should consider how:

- families with severely absent pupils are factored into local eligibility decisions: if pupils face out-of-school barriers and the family do not have a social worker, they should routinely be assessed for Family Help;
- Family Help contributes to the expectation that schools and local authorities agree a joint approach for all severely absent pupils;
- practitioners understand the importance of absence as an indicator of wider need, the benefits of improving attendance to improve outcomes for the whole family, and the role of the Virtual School Head [for children with a social worker](#).

Areas should also liaise with education teams to ensure they are aware of issues relating to the needs of children who are not on a school roll, for example children missing from education or electively home educated children.

## **Keeping families together – Reunification and Family Group Decision Making**

Family Help has an important role in supporting children and young people to return safely and sustainably to their parents or wider family from care. Effective support for these children and families increases the likelihood of stable, long lasting relationships and children living safely within their family networks. A whole-family approach, including increased use of family group decision-making, is an opportunity to empower families by prioritising family-led solutions. Family group decision-making also plays a crucial role in supporting reunification by enabling families to develop sustainable plans that facilitate a child's safe return home.

Local partnerships should understand their data on reunification and consider how Family Help supports robust preparation, planning and support for all children. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations and guidance<sup>2</sup> already provides clear direction for local authorities regarding their duty to return a looked after child to their family unless this is not consistent with safeguarding and promoting the child's welfare. The rollout of Family Help provides an opportunity to strengthen practice and improve outcomes for these children and their families. It is important that local support services are accessible for all children and young people, including looked after children who may be accessing the same services as families in Family Help.

## **Children affected by parental imprisonment**

Family Help can also play an important role in helping to maintain relationships where children may have a parent in prison. Local partnerships should consider what data or information they have on children affected by parental imprisonment and consider how Family Help can offer appropriate support.

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<sup>2</sup> [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review - GOV.UK](#)



## Chapter 2: Delivery expectations

This section sets out the expectations for practice and areas of local flexibility to support safeguarding partners to plan their transformation activity for Family Help, multi-agency child protection and Family Group Decision Making.

### Section 1: Family Help

Family Help aims to improve children's outcomes by understanding and responding to the needs and circumstances of the family as early as possible to enable children to thrive and families to remain together.

Family Help will take place at the heart of communities, bringing together local services under a combined, multi-disciplinary practice approach and service offer. It will be underpinned by a set of key principles that will inform the delivery of services:

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

### Identifying need for Family Help

Family Help is for all children, young people and families whose needs are multiple and/or complex. This includes those who are currently eligible for targeted early help or receiving support and services as a child in need, and those subject to child protection enquiries and plans. Where appropriate, it may also include support for children in care – both as part of services they may be receiving while in care, but also as part of planning and support to return home to their families. Families who access Family Help will consent to assessment and the support they receive, unless there are child protection concerns and activity.

By multiple and/or complex, we mean that a family's needs are above the level of universal and community based early help, such as that provided by a Family Hub or in community settings, and they are unable to access and navigate support themselves. In Family Help, these families will be officially recorded in a local area's children's social care case management system and assigned a Family Help Lead Practitioner.

Below is a list of issues or indicators that should be considered in relation to whether Family Help is the most appropriate course of action – it is not exhaustive:

- child and/or adult mental health issues
- child and/or adult substance misuse
- domestic abuse
- neglect



- physical abuse
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse
- teenage relationship abuse
- a child who is frequently missing/goes missing from care or from home
- a child who is at risk of modern slavery, trafficking, sexual and/or criminal exploitation
- a child who is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including being affected by gangs and county lines and organised crime groups and/or serious violence, including knife crime
- a child who is viewing problematic and/or inappropriate content (for example, linked to violence), or developing inappropriate relationships online
- a child who is at risk of radicalisation
- a child who has a parent or carer in custody
- a child who is bereaved
- a child who is a young carer
- a child who is exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved parental conflict
- a child who has returned home to their family from care
- a child who has unmet physical and/or developmental needs
- a child who is disabled
- a child who has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory education health and care (EHC) plan)
- a child who is missing education, persistently or severely absent from school, or not receiving a suitable education
- a child who has experienced multiple suspensions and is at risk of, or has been permanently excluded
- housing insecurity including temporary accommodation
- financial insecurity including adult worklessness and youth NEET status

The support and services that families receive will look different depending on specific circumstances, but it should always be underpinned by a whole-family approach, where multi-disciplinary professionals wrap support around the family to address challenges at the earliest opportunity. The type of support that disabled children and their families may need is potentially different from other children and families who will be supported through Family Help. They may require support for the entirety of their childhood, and sit across children's social care, education and health. This means that their support offer should be adjusted to reflect that – for example, safeguarding partners should consider using a more flexible approach to assessments for disabled children (where there are not child protection concerns).

The following sections outline the key practice changes associated with moving to Family Help:

1. [A seamless offer of Family Help: Closer alignment between Targeted Early Help and Child in Need \(Section 17\)](#)

2. [Family Help Lead Practitioners](#)
3. [Multi-disciplinary Family Help Teams](#)
4. [Family Help Assessment and Plans](#)
5. [Front Door Arrangements](#)

## A Seamless Offer of Family Help: Targeted Early Help and Child in Need

Central to Family Help is a closer alignment between targeted early help and child in need support and services, to create a seamless support system that promotes early intervention. Families should not be left waiting to access help and support when issues arise – a more flexible and responsive system will remove barriers and ensure support is wrapped around families at the point of need. Through this, it will be possible to bring the whole-family approach championed in targeted early help to a larger number of families.

The legislative framework is not changing. Local authorities will continue to have a general duty to provide support and services where children are deemed to be in need (including disabled children). Working Together is clear that local authorities should work with safeguarding partners and other relevant agencies to determine a local protocol as to how this is delivered. The ambition is that Family Help will flex to the needs of children, young people and their families, where needs change or complexity increases, practitioners will deliver support within a consistent practice framework, and relationships will be maintained as much as possible. While families may move between targeted early help and child in need support and services within Family Help, this should feel seamless with minimal disruption – supported by greater consistency in lead practitioner, the use of single assessments and plans which can be adapted and built on over time, helping families retain relationships and trust in the system of support.

Local authorities will continue to provide annual data returns to the department on support and services provided to children and their families under section 17 and section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Working Together already clarifies that as needs change, support and services should respond effectively. This is why multi-agency child protection teams are embedded in the Family Help system and will wrap around the family, alongside the ongoing support from the Family Help Lead Practitioner.

### Expectations

- delivering Family Help will mean, as a minimum, **bringing together family support workers (or equivalent) and social workers into a single service**. This will cover a broad continuum of need – from targeted early help through to multi-agency child protection - that responds more flexibly to a range of contexts, needs and harms;
- safeguarding partnerships should work together to **publish a refreshed threshold document** by the end of the transformation year (March 2026) to confirm the changes and remove the need for handovers, building on

assessments and plans as needs change. This should set out a broad continuum of Family Help, showing the range of needs for all children that will be supported – with an emphasis on fluidity and prioritising family experience, as opposed to gatekeeping against rigid thresholds;

- safeguarding partners should update their local protocol for assessment and support;
- safeguarding partners should consider how Family Help can address the **needs of a diverse range of children** (from babies, including pre-birth, to teenagers) and families, including but not limited to children with SEND, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and children with a parent in custody.

## Local Flexibility

- **team structure:** It will be for local partnerships to determine where the new teams will be based and how many teams they will have. For local partnerships that have an existing locality model, there could be multiple teams based in settings across their area (more information can be found in 'multi-disciplinary family help teams').

## Family Help Lead Practitioner

Family Help should be led by Family Help lead practitioners (FHLPs) who will be a range of practitioners from different disciplines with the right knowledge, skills and experience to support families who need help and support. Some will be social work qualified, and others will have alternative appropriate skills or qualifications. They may or may not be employed directly by the local authority but will be integrated into multi-disciplinary Family Help teams with appropriate oversight set out in the safeguarding partners' local protocol. In line with the National Framework, FHLPs will work with families to build strong relationships based on respect and work in a strengths based way, recognising that families, and family networks, will often have solutions to their own challenges. FHLPs will have a focus on the whole family, recognising this is often the best way of improving outcomes for children and young people.

The FHLP will remain the main point of contact for the family for as long as they require support. The FHLP will be alert to all forms of significant harm and work with multi-agency child protection teams (MACPTs) and Lead Child Protection Practitioners (LCPPs) to respond to it, retaining the lead relationship with the child and family. They will have the knowledge and skills to draw on relevant evidence-based interventions and to collaborate with and identify the relevant agencies or individuals required to meet a family's unique set of needs and form the 'team around the family'<sup>3</sup> (TAF). Whilst the FHLP will be the main point of contact for the family, it is through the expertise across the TAF that families receive the help and support they need.

Children and families have said they want a consistent, trusting relationship with a

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<sup>3</sup> The team around the family is the team of practitioners that the FHLP brings together to meet the child, young person or family's needs.

practitioner. To support and preserve such relationships, FHLPs should carry out or co-ordinate all or most of the direct work with the family for as long as it is safe to do so. FHLPs should be qualified social workers when it is agreed that a child protection plan is needed. In some cases, this will mean that the lead practitioner will change for a child who moves onto a child protection plan because their FHLP is not a qualified social worker. FHLPs, supported by expertise from LCPPs, will be the main practitioner responsible for child protection direct practice with families.

Embedding experienced social work qualified FHLPs in multi-disciplinary Family Help teams, whilst ensuring access to expert advice from LCPPs within MACPTs, will mean that less experienced FHLPs have the right advice knowledge and skills, to keep working with families wherever possible. The MACPT will be responsible for statutory child protection decisions and oversee child protection activity. Family Help teams will include highly experienced social workers, including in child protection practice, to ensure that child protection expertise and oversight is embedded in practice across the whole system. All FHLPs should receive effective and appropriate supervision and support. The safeguarding partners and any relevant agencies, should develop, agree, and publish local protocols for assessments and support.

## **Expectations**

Safeguarding partners should establish the FHLP role, building on their current practice. To support implementation, safeguarding partners, should:

- have a shared practice framework across agencies, that covers the end-to-end system of help, support and protection, in line with the National Framework outcomes and the requirements of Working Together;
- publish local protocols for assessments and support, including clarifying who can act as an FHLP for children receiving support and services as a child in need and the skills, experience, oversight and accountability requirements outlined in Working Together. Plans for providing social work oversight should also be clarified;
- develop a multi-agency workforce development plan outlining the training, knowledge and skill levels for the Family Help workforce including the FHLP role.

## **Identifying the right Family Help Lead Practitioner:**

Safeguarding partners should have clear processes in place to identify the most suitable lead practitioner to support families in Family Help and consider how a range of practitioners from across the partnership could be appointed into the role.

Where appropriate, safeguarding partners should engage families, including children and young people, to have a say in who their lead practitioner is, taking into account their views, wishes and feelings – as well as the experiences of children and families with protected characteristics.

Safeguarding partners should consider how to keep changes of FHLP to a minimum and, when a change is necessary, the approach that should be followed to minimise the

impact of families. For example, when deciding who the right FHLP will be, consideration should be given to the complexity of need, including concerns about significant harm and whether a social work qualified FHLP should be allocated from the outset. Where a change of FHLP is required, consideration could be given to whether the previous FHLP could continue to work with the family as part of the TAF, enabling a consistent relationship to continue.

### **Supervision and oversight:**

Effective supervision will play a critical role in ensuring a clear focus on a child's welfare and safety. Lead practitioners should have access to high quality supervision. Supervision should be regular, consistent and reflective to support practitioners in their practice, development and wellbeing, enabling practitioners to work effectively with children, young people and families.

Safeguarding partners will need to determine management structures and supervision arrangements in line with Working Together to ensure appropriate oversight for Family Help support. Oversight and supervision arrangements should be reviewed, and local protocols updated, to outline responsibilities and decision making, recognising a broader range of lead practitioners will be working with families.

As set out in Working Together, safeguarding partners should consider how to quality assure the work with families. This might include through audit, management / case supervision, critical and reflective supervision, and easily accessible guidance. This includes having procedures in place for the supervision and oversight of all FHLPs, including those not employed by the local authority, to ensure they continue to receive appropriate supervision and support for continuing professional development and to maintain professional registration, where appropriate, within their existing line management arrangements.

Safeguarding partners will want to consider the use of reflective group, multi-agency and clinical supervision.

### **FHLP roles and responsibilities:**

The roles and responsibilities of FHLPs detailed below should inform workforce development plans, including ongoing FHLP training, learning and development.

The FHLP should:

- take a whole family approach to practice;
- build a relationship with the family and, wherever possible, remain their main point of contact for as long as they require support;
- conduct assessments and implement a whole family plan;
- establish a 'team around the family' (TAF), bringing in relevant agencies or individuals;
- offer Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) to support families to find their own solutions;

- engage the multi-agency child protection team (MACPT) where there are concerns about likely or actual significant harm;
- where there is likely or actual significant harm, maintain coordinated support for the family and deliver the child protection plan, working alongside the LCPP and MACPT;
- create a sustainability plan with the family, so they can refer back to the challenges they have overcome, their strengths and next steps when moving on from Family Help.

### **Knowledge, skills and experience:**

The FHLP will need the knowledge, skills and experience to build relationships with and work with families receiving support through Family Help, including those with a child protection plan.

Knowledge, skills and experience should:

- meet the requirements set out in Working Together and the National Framework;
- align with a shared practice framework and evidence-based interventions (such as in the [Practice Guides](#)) for use across the multi-agency workforce;
- be determined by and align with the FHLP role and responsibilities, ensuring these are fulfilled;
- be sufficient to meet the individual needs of all children including babies, children, young people and families;
- be anti-discriminatory and taking into account the unique circumstances of each child, young person and family including ethnicity, race and culture;
- be set out in local protocols.

It is important FHLPs are culturally competent, understand the impact of poverty on family life, and able to take an anti-racist and an anti-discriminatory approach in all aspects of their work.

### **Training:**

The information set out below does not replace any statutory guidance on training. Safeguarding partners should ensure guidance on training requirements, set out in Working Together and the National Framework are met.

Safeguarding partners should outline training requirements for FHLPs in their multi-agency workforce development plans.

Safeguarding partners will need to consider how to deliver and evaluate the effectiveness of training undertaken by FHLPs across a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency workforce to ensure outcomes for children, young people and families are met.

Some practitioners may benefit from, or want to complete, a relevant apprenticeship. The early intervention practitioner apprenticeship and the children, young people and families practitioner apprenticeship both cover relevant skills and knowledge for those working in

Family Help.

### Local flexibility:

- **choosing the right lead practitioner:** Local authorities and partner agencies can use flexibility in selecting lead practitioners, as per Working Together, which confirms that the lead practitioner does not always need to be a social worker when providing support and services to children in need. The safeguarding partnership should have clear processes in place to identify the most suitable lead practitioner to support families across the Family Help continuum of need and consider how practitioners from across the partnership could be appointed as the FHLP, including under Section 17.

## Multi-disciplinary Family Help Teams

Community-based, multi-disciplinary teams should wrap help and support around children, young people and their families. This should take a whole family approach – considering not only the presenting needs of the child or young person, but also the needs of the family and how those impact children and young people. To ensure support is inclusive, consideration should be given to race, ethnicity, and/or culture, as well as other protected characteristics. Where needed, a range of practitioners and services should be provided for the family, so a range of needs can be addressed, and challenges overcome. The Family Help Lead Practitioner will co-ordinate this support, helping a family to navigate the help and support they need, which might include accessing multiple services.

Family Help teams will be multi-disciplinary and draw on multi-agency partners. These teams will build on those already operating in the early help space, established through the Supporting Families Programme.

### Expectations

- local partnerships should set up, or build on existing multi-disciplinary teams, to include co-working between a wide range of practitioners including family support workers (or equivalent), social workers and other alternatively qualified or specialist roles. Examples of services that practitioners might work in include:
  - domestic abuse
  - substance misuse
  - children and adult mental health
  - SEND – including the Designated Social Care Officer Role, as encouraged in Working Together
  - parental conflict
  - school attendance support teams
  - prison and probation
  - public health
  - youth justice
  - youth work
  - adult social care, specifically Safeguarding Adult Boards



- police
- victim support including wider sexual abuse support
- health visiting
- midwives, sexual health and school nursing
- employment advisors to support parents who are out of work
- homelessness and housing
- while these new multi-disciplinary family help teams may be based on an extension of existing teams – local partnerships should refer to population needs assessments to determine the different agencies, services and practitioners that should be part of their multi-disciplinary teams. Local partnerships may want to update these assessments as part of their transformation activity.
- when setting up multi-disciplinary teams, safeguarding partners should consider how to effectively join up Family Help with existing SEND services, to improve access to support for children with special educational needs, and disabilities.

### Local Flexibility

- **structure of teams (size and location):** Decisions on the size and location of teams will depend on local circumstances. Local authorities, with partners, could consider using family hubs, where they exist, as a location to base these teams.
- **the role of individual practitioners within the team:** Multi-disciplinary practitioners in the team could perform a number of functions – e.g. they could: provide direct support to families; triage or provide advice at the front door; provide consultative support to FHLPs as part of TAF or a link back to their home organisation to help facilitate appropriate support. Local partnerships have discretion to determine these arrangements based on their local circumstances and workforce.
- **co-location of teams:** While the co-location of services and practitioners makes it easier for families to access the services they need; it will be for local partnerships to determine their local arrangements. This includes how the teams are resourced across agencies and the flexibility of working arrangements to meet the needs of families.

### Family Help Assessment and Plans

In Family Help, we are aiming for one assessment and plan, which will stay and evolve with a family, and will be accessed by all practitioners and agencies working with them. While circumstances will change and new information will need to be captured, this should be added to existing assessments and plans, rather than starting from a blank slate. This aligns with the ambition that families will have consistent lead practitioners, and the system will wrap around them.

Assessments and plans should cover non statutory targeted early help and support, and services provided to a child in need where requirements are set out in Working Together. Local partnerships will need to determine how assessments are brought together into a



single plan. Where appropriate, assessment should also build on help and support provided in universal or community based services including family hubs.

## Expectations

Safeguarding partners should:

- develop family help assessments and plans in line with Working Together, which sets out principles for high-quality assessments and plans. These should be accessed and jointly monitored by all the agencies working with the child, young person and family;
- establish an assessment which can be tailored to the level of need identified within a family, including adapting appropriately for children with SEND and disabled children and their families, taking into account previous interventions and wider contextual factors including for example where a parent is imprisoned;
- ensure practitioners consider the needs of the whole-family as part of the assessment and that the child, young person and family voice is captured and reflected in the plan – whilst being clear the needs of the child are paramount;
- adhere to the maximum timelines for child in need assessments set out in Working Together;
- coordinate with other assessments that are ongoing (such as an Education, Health and Care assessment, or a Prevention and Diversion Assessment), or if previously completed, practitioners should use assessments to build a complete picture of the child and their family (as set out in Working Together);
- develop family help plans that provide clear, measurable outcomes for the child or young person and set expectations for families, with reviewable actions to track progress. Plans should specify the agencies and practitioners involved, the services available, and how success will be measured. Regular reviews should assess whether progress has been made to meet the child or young person's needs;
- have robust oversight arrangements as required by Working Together through the local protocol for assessment and support;
- seek consent prior to an assessment being completed, adhering to legal frameworks and guidance around consent and children and young people;
- build on any previous assessments or plans that might have been put in place in universal/community based early help.

## Local Flexibility

- **internal timelines:** Working Together requires that assessments for a child in need should be completed within 45 days, areas retain flexibility to set timescales for targeted early help;
- **the practitioner who leads the assessment:** assessments can be led by a range of practitioners, and it is for local partnerships to determine appropriate oversight and sign off arrangements;

- **reviews:** local safeguarding partners can determine their process and timelines for reviewing plans. There should be mechanisms to review the effectiveness and impact of the plan;
- **naming conventions:** local safeguarding partners can determine the title of their assessment and plans. Local partnerships should continue to be mindful of the language used and this could be reviewed during the co-design process including seeking the views of families on terminology.

## Front Door Arrangements

Families should receive the right support, at the right time. Every local area has a front door: a mechanism for determining how to get children, young people and families the help they need. Some are multi-agency; others are single agency. Local partnerships should consider how their front door arrangements will be integrated into the Family Help offer, supporting engagement and ensuring the right decisions are made in a timely manner. Local partnerships should also consider how children and families first engage with services and how to make this accessible and de-stigmatising.

### Expectations for triaging at the front door

- move towards an integrated front door, where contacts and referrals can be triaged to the right level of service; this should include families being connected to universal and community services if required. Local partnerships operating Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) should review/explore how their functions might align more strongly with other places where families might come into contact with services, for example, separate early help front doors;
- consider the range of practitioners and agencies that could be brought into the integrated front door - this could include for example education, police, health and youth workers.

### Local Flexibility for triaging at the front door

- **location:** local partnerships can determine the location of their front door – for example, in areas where there are family hubs, we would encourage these areas to consider the role family hubs could play in providing an access point to services;
- **co-location:** local partnerships can determine whether teams are co-located physically or virtually;
- **make up of front door teams:** local partnerships can determine the practitioners and agencies at the front door, for example, including considering those with SEND, youth work or domestic abuse expertise, or from services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS);
- **links to the Multi-agency Child Protection Team (MACPT):** local partnerships can determine the most efficient way to align with and work alongside MACPTs. Ensuring swift action in identifying and protecting children from significant harm when such referrals are made;

- **the extent of the digital offer** to support families and practitioners to navigate services;
- **considering out of hours services**, to support the identification of need outside core working hours.

### **Expectations for promoting engagement with services**

- implement digital solutions such as a service directory, social media and also roles such as community connectors and service access points which provide accessible opportunities for families to understand and access support;
- as much as is practical, local partnerships should embed a relationship-based approach to practice at the front door where families and practitioners can have a conversation about the help they need.

## Section 2: Multi-agency Child Protection

- Effective multi-agency child protection is a system where the right decisions are made at the right time for children to keep them safe;
- Establishing multi-agency child protection teams will bring a clear, fresh focus where there are child protection concerns, bringing experts together across agencies to identify actual or likely significant harm and take decisive action to protect children.

### A Seamless System of Help, Support and Protection

It is critical that local safeguarding partners design and deliver child protection together as an integrated multi-agency system within Family Help. Multi-agency child protection arrangements should seek to protect all children from actual or likely significant harm, inside and outside of the home, including online. Multi-agency child protection should also engage and empower parents, family networks and others in a transparent and compassionate way to care safely for their children, wherever this is possible.

Families will stay rooted in Family Help including when child protection action is necessary, with Family Help Lead Practitioners (FHLPs) continuing their relationship and responsibilities for direct practice and coordinating support and input for families across the system. FHLPs will play a crucial role in working with the multi-agency child protection team to make sure that the day-to-day life and experiences of the child and family are really understood, and child protection decisions centre this information. Where a child needs a protection plan, the FHLP should be a social worker if they aren't already.

Where a child comes to the attention of Family Help because of significant harm concerns but is not previously known, the FHLP should be a social worker. The FHLP will be responsible for the coordination of support and services that may be needed while a section 47 enquiry takes place, as well as throughout any subsequent child protection plan.

It will remain critical to have social workers with child protection expertise within Family Help to be the FHLP for children in need where needs are particularly complex, or for children who are subject to a s47 enquiry as well as those on child protection plans.

Creating a multi-agency child protection system will include:

1. [Establishing multi-agency child protection teams](#)
2. [Embedding the lead child protection practitioner role \(LCPPs\)](#)
3. [Responding to local needs and harms](#)
4. [Responding to significant harm outside the home](#)
5. [Providing information, support and advice to parents and carers in child protection](#)

## Establishing Multi-agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs)

As statutory safeguarding partners, local authorities, integrated care boards and the police already have a joint and equal duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area – and should dedicate resource to discharge this duty. Through this programme, we expect safeguarding partners to establish new, expert-led multi-agency child protection teams (MACPTs) to support the local authority to discharge its duties under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (duty to investigate). MACPTs will deliver specific child protection functions. New, expert social worker Lead Child Protection Practitioners (LCPPs), embedded within MACPTs, will be responsible for statutory child protection decisions drawing on the expertise and knowledge of the wider multi-agency practitioners in the team. The teams will carry out these functions in line with Working Together and the National Framework (2023) and build on learning from the Families First for Children Pathfinders.

### Expectations:

Safeguarding partners will:

- nominate a core membership of dedicated, experienced, highly skilled and suitably qualified social workers (including into the new LCPP roles), police officers, registered health practitioners and persons with experience of education;
- determine which other relevant agencies (such as probation, domestic abuse services and youth workers) should be involved in the MACPT according to local demographics, needs and harm profiles;
- decide the location, number of teams and staffing arrangements for local MACPTs;
- determine how MACPTs integrate with and build on existing arrangements in the wider system (such as local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs or equivalents), whilst retaining a distinct identity and clear focus on direct multi-agency child protection activities;
- agree, allocate and transparently set out multi-agency resourcing;
- agree the shared vision, structure, and practice framework that includes senior management oversight and accountability for delivery and delegated decision-making (as part of strategic, statutory multi-agency safeguarding arrangements);
- set out how operational decisions and the related responsibilities of different agencies will be made and quality-assured for children who are the focus of section 47 enquiries and child protection plans. This should include medical assessments and multi-agency investigation procedures (which will depend on the type(s) of significant harm identified);
- establish a mechanism for triaging, reviewing and acting on referrals sent to the MACPT, including links to the MASH or other front door referral teams and responsibilities for out of hours services;
- consider and set out the role of the MACPT, including the LCPP, in supporting transitions out of child protection, including reunification, role in the Public Law

Outline and pre-proceedings and transitions between child and adult services (often referred to as transitional safeguarding) and Family Help or universal services;

- consider and set out chairing arrangements for child protection conferences within the MACPT, whilst ensuring clear ongoing quality assurance;
- set out access to group and individual reflective and clinical supervision and training
- consider how the team will quality assure child protection plans. Quality assurance should have regard to whether proposed actions clearly correspond to goals, whether these goals are adequately progressed, and whether plans meet needs arising from contextual factors identified during assessments;
- establish the MACPT(s) as a local centre of expertise accessible to all child and family practitioners across the multi-agency system, through overseeing, supporting and evidencing best practice in child protection;
- set out reporting requirements aligned with the requirements in Working Together for Safeguarding Partner Yearly Reports.

The roles and responsibilities for the MACPT should inform workforce development plans.

MACPT members should work together to:

- promote a sense of collective responsibility among agencies to protect children;
- provide child protection advice and expertise across the multi-agency system;
- build upon or conduct thorough assessments of children's needs by considering various perspectives and expertise from across the team, as well as the wider system;
- ensure that interventions are prompt, evidence-based and tailored to the child and family's needs, proactively addressing issues before they escalate;
- use resources efficiently by pooling expertise and services from various agencies;
- facilitate better communication and information sharing among practitioners and agencies.

### **Local flexibility:**

- some pathfinder local partnerships have aligned MACPTs with the local authority's locality structure; others have established specialist MACPTs to respond to particular needs or harms, for example exploitation. These decisions will be for local area partnerships to determine as they prepare to implement change and should be informed by local safeguarding partner readiness assessments, intelligence about harm types and what is working well locally in child protection practice.

## Functions of the Multi-agency Child Protection Teams

MACPTs will work closely alongside FHLs who will retain their role with the family throughout child protection activity, including implementing child protection plans, with MACPT support and oversight. Child protection enquiries and plans should build on information and activity set out in the existing single family help assessment and plan or inform one where the child is not already known to Family Help.

### Expectations

Specific MACPT functions include:

- chairing strategy meetings and child protection conferences;
- leading section 47 enquiries;
- leading or overseeing multi-agency and single investigations (as required);
- gathering information about whether a child is suffering significant harm, to support decision making;
- build in family group decision making and family network engagement into child protection processes;
- overseeing the development, review and closure of child protection plans;
- input to onward planning for children and families (including continued support from Family Help or supporting reunification);
- initiating emergency action (Emergency Protection Orders, Police Protection Orders);
- deciding whether to move into pre-proceedings and the Public Law Outline (PLO) process;
- providing relevant evidence to subsequent court proceedings;
- providing advice and consultation for practitioners who need multi-agency child protection expertise;
- maintaining an understanding of local patterns of significant harm and agency responses;
- oversight of all children who are the subject of section 47 enquiries or on a child protection plan and a clear line of sight to and from the local safeguarding partnership.

Working Together currently requires child protection conferences to be chaired by a social worker independent from the line management for the lead practitioner. The LCPP role will fulfil this function.

### Other agencies and expertise

Safeguarding partners should determine the precise membership of MACPTs, beyond the minimum members, in line with local demographics, needs, and patterns of harm to best support and protect local children and their families. This should include understanding and responding to sexual abuse and extra-familial contexts of harm; the needs of all age groups from vulnerable babies (including pre-birth) to teenagers; and

different cultures, communities and ethnicities, ensuring practice is anti-discriminatory and inclusive. Examples of services that members could have individuals included in the MACPT:

- Prison and probation
- Youth justice
- Youth work
- Virtual school headteachers and/or local authority education teams
- Voluntary sector
- Family/children and young people engagement leads
- Multi-cultural community organisations
- Disabled children's teams
- Mental health practitioners (children and young people and adult services/specialisms, including maternal and perinatal)
- Health visitors and midwives
- School and/or public health nurses
- Sexual health practitioners
- Paediatricians with expertise in child protection
- Forensic physicians
- Domestic abuse services
- Substance misuse services
- Victim support services



## Embedding the Lead Child Protection Practitioner Role

### Lead Child Protection Practitioners

Each local area should introduce new 'Lead Child Protection Practitioner' (LCPP) social worker roles that are embedded in the local MACPT(s).

LCPPs should:

- be qualified social workers with substantial frontline child protection practice experience within children's social care (enquiries, assessments, reviews, conferences, decision-making and supervision) and an in-depth knowledge of the statutory and legislative framework;
- be skilled at identifying and responding to all types of significant harm, including extra-familial harm, recognising children can experience harm both within and outside the home;
- know how to work skilfully and confidently with families and parents in child protection, situating them as partners where safe to do so, and including those who have demonstrated resistant, hostile and/or deceptive behaviour;
- support partners to consider the influence of different extra-familial contexts in child protection, steering conversations towards a focus on building safety around children within public/peer contexts where they have or may come to harm;
- demonstrate anti-discriminatory, inclusive practice and be responsive to the needs and experiences of children and families of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds;
- ensure MACPT members maintain a consistent focus on best interests of the child - this is equally important in the case of extra-familial harm where children demonstrate offending behaviour as a result of being exploited and groomed.

This is not an exhaustive list.

### Responding to Local Needs and Harms

It will be important for MACPTs to be equipped to identify, understand and respond effectively to all harm types, inside and outside of the home and online. Abuse and exploitation can take many forms – from domestic abuse to child sexual abuse or physical harm inside the home to exploitation, trafficking or peer on peer abuse outside the home. Children can also experience more than one type of harm, and it will be important for MACPTs to recognise this when protecting children.

Data consistently shows that babies in the home and teenagers outside of the home are the highest risk groups when it comes to serious incidents. MACPTs should therefore ensure that they understand and respond effectively to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of all children from pre-birth onwards, including these groups. MACPTs will also need to consider that for some children, a safe and loving family environment is not enough to protect them from harms outside the home. For others, problems which exist within the home, such as abuse and neglect, could increase a child's vulnerability to exploitation and extra-familial harm.

It will be important to MACPTs to explore how the child's experiences within their families and networks, including their friends and peer groups, interplay with the risk of harm outside of the home and identify what needs to change. Recognising and responding to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of children with SEND will be critical. The impact of poverty should also be understood, with practitioners skilled at recognising the distinction between poverty and neglect and responding accordingly.

Practice should be inclusive, anti-discriminatory and responsive to the needs and experiences of children and families of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Practitioners should be alive to any bias in practice that may adversely impact particular groups or communities and consider children first and foremost in terms of vulnerability to harm. For instance, care should be taken to ensure children of particular ethnic backgrounds are not 'adultified'.

## **Responding to Significant Harm Outside the Home**

Children can experience harm in various extra-familial contexts such as schools and colleges, peer groups, community and public spaces, and/or online. Types of harm include criminal or sexual exploitation, serious violence, modern slavery, trafficking<sup>4</sup>, teenage relationship abuse, and influences of extremism which could lead to radicalisation. Working Together is clear that children who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, significant harm outside the home should receive a child protection response.

The Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme multi-agency practice principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm<sup>5</sup> and emerging evidence from Durham University's Planning for Safety research project<sup>6</sup> outline a number of key features which MACPTs, working alongside the FHLP, should consider when tailoring their multi-agency child protection response to harm outside the home. These build on the expectations set out in the National Framework and include:

### **Putting children first, understanding their experiences and responding to their needs**

- be curious about what drives behaviour;
- listen to how children define and describe their identity;
- be aware of disproportionality and negative biases, such as adultification.

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<sup>4</sup> If there are concerns that a child may be a potential victim of modern slavery or child trafficking then a referral should be made to the National Referral Mechanism and, where available, the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Service, alongside a referral to children's social care - *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023*

<sup>5</sup> [Multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Planning for Safety | Contextual Safeguarding: Embedding Risk Outside of the Home \(ROTH\) pathways](#)

## **Positioning of parents/carers as partners in, rather than the subject of, the child protection process wherever safe to do so**

- approach parents and carers as partners and ensure their voice is heard;
- involve parents and carers in producing reports and planning for safety;
- build trusting relationships to support parents/carers share their concerns and needs.

## **Considering the influence of different contexts on children and young people's safety, and the capacity of their parents and carers and professionals to protect them**

- assess where harm is taking place and where the child or young person feels safe and/or unsafe. This is sometimes referred to as 'context weighting';<sup>7</sup>
- consider the often-overlapping influences that different contexts can have on each other, children and their families;
- determine any changes to where children are safe or unsafe, and prioritise actions that build safety in these contexts.

## **Working collaboratively and creatively, with parents and carers, children, and community partners, to understand the extra-familial context in which harm is occurring and to determine the actions that each can take to help create safety**

- bring together partners<sup>8</sup> to develop creative solutions to build safety around children and within the contexts that may facilitate or cause harm;
- share knowledge about services, interventions, and/or support offered by the wider safeguarding partnership and local community, including voluntary sector organisations;
- when responding to contexts, MAPCTs should consider three key areas:
  1. **Children's Needs:** take a child welfare approach to identify and meet the needs of children in the context.
  2. **Community Guardianship:** identify trusted adults or peers and build/increase their safeguarding role.
  3. **Environmental Factors:** address environmental features that contribute to harm or safety, such as improving lighting or running positive activities.

## **Knowledge and expertise of the child protection conference chair on the nature of extra-familial harm and the types of resources/services available locally that can influence extra-familial contexts.<sup>9</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> Further information on contextual weighting is available at [Context Weighting | Contextual Safeguarding](#) including the [Contextual Safeguarding | Context Weighting Guide \(June 2022\)](#) which provides examples of how to use context weighting in assessment and planning.

<sup>8</sup> Such as those working in voluntary, private and statutory organisations who may come into contact with or be aware of the presence of children in their day-to-day roles in the community - *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)*

<sup>9</sup> Emerging findings from Durham University's research has shown the added value of the Chair having expertise in extra-familial harm, particularly their role in helping partners to take a holistic approach to

- facilitate context focused conversations to share understanding of which contexts most require attention and a holistic assessment of the child needs;
- coordinate traditional and non-traditional safeguarding partners, parents/carers, and children to work collaboratively to understand harms and identify child-welfare-focussed solutions;
- ensure that the welfare of the child is paramount in planning, including for those children who may be causing harm to others. It is vital to advocate the value of understanding their experiences and meeting their needs as a route to safeguarding their welfare, to reduce the likelihood of harm to themselves and others.<sup>10</sup>

## Information, Support and Advice for Parents and Carers

Parents and carers involved in child protection need high quality information, advice and support to engage effectively and make meaningful change to keep their child(ren) safe. Local partnerships should develop consistent approaches to working collaboratively with all parents and carers, having regard to the principles set out in Working Together.

### Expectations

Through both Family Help and MACPTs, local areas should:

- build positive, trusting and co-operative partnerships with parents wherever possible;
- set out their engagement, information and support offer for all parents and carers in child protection;
- provide clear, accessible information and signpost support for all parents and carers from the point a section 47 enquiry is initiated. This should cover the process, what they can expect, what is expected of them, and their rights;
- work with parents and carers, including those with lived experience of child protection, those living in areas of high deprivation and from diverse communities to design and deliver the service;
- develop and implement a plan to reach a wide range of parents and carers including fathers and male carers, those who are neurodiverse and parents and carers where the harm is extra-familial, and parents are a protective factor;
- consider innovative approaches to working with parents and carers who may be unwilling or unable to participate in decisions about their family;
- adapt responses to meet the diverse needs of parents and carers including parents/ and carers of disabled children, parents and carers that are disabled, with mental health needs and/or who have English as an additional language;

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address all types of extra-familial harm children can experience outside the home and identify actions to address contexts of harm and the dynamics of extra-familial harm, including escalating risk and recognising and challenging system/structures drivers of harm.

<sup>10</sup> Consider the views of the child/young person when agreeing a plan; their acceptability of any actions will be key to ongoing engagement and ensure that the desired goals reflect what the child/young person needs.

- understand the family members' background, ethnicity, religion, financial situation, education, sex, ages and sexual orientation, and potential barriers certain groups may experience in seeking and accessing help and support;
- have in place relevant and appropriate data sharing arrangements to support identification of children and families needing support, help or protection.

## Section 3: Family Group Decision Making

Families should be supported to enable their children to remain living at home with their birth parents, where it is safe to do so. Children who stay with their families have considerably better outcomes than children who enter local authority care. Empowering families and wider family networks, supported by practitioners in both Family Help and multi-agency child protection, to make plans to support children and help families to stay together safely, is central to the whole family approach in this end-to-end system reform.

A family network may include the child's parents or any other person with parental responsibility for the child, relatives, friends or other persons connected with the child. Siblings, cousins, family friends, neighbours or other members of a child's community, might also form a part of the family network. Family networks can play a key role in supporting families to stay together safely, and even when this is not possible, can often offer a safe, loving and stable home which helps to keep children out of local authority care. Family networks can also, with the right support from trained practitioners, help parents and carers access support to address their own needs, while continuing to offer vital stability to children and young people.

Family group decision-making (FGDM) is a term used to describe a voluntary process that enables a family network to come together and make a family-led plan in response to concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing, working alongside skilled professionals. The plan will include offering practical support to parents and carers, whilst prioritising the safety and wellbeing of the child. FGDM helps to ensure a family network is engaged and empowered to participate in decision-making while a child and their family is receiving help, support or protection. Family Help Lead Practitioners (FHLPs) and multi-agency child protection teams (MACPTs) will play a crucial role in supporting FGDM as the practitioners who know the child and family well and are delivering help, support and in some cases, protection through an existing plan. Growing evidence<sup>11</sup> shows that Family Group Conferences (FGC), a form of FGDM, have been highly successful in preventing children from entering and remaining in the care system. FGDM should be embedded within Family Help and multi-agency child protection, benefiting from consistency in lead practitioners and multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working.

Implementing family group decision making includes:

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<sup>11</sup> <https://foundations.org.uk/our-work/publications/family-group-conferencing-at-pre-proceedings-stage/>

- building a family first culture with the integration of FGDM at every point from Family Help, into support, through multi-agency child protection and into care;
- offering FGDM at the pre-proceedings stage to ensure that families on the edge of care are offered the opportunity to make a family-led plan before care proceedings are initiated, if this offer is in the child's best interests.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill includes a measure to mandate local authorities to offer a 'family group decision making' meeting at the point the local authority is seriously considering applying to the court for a care or supervision order, to give all families an opportunity to come together and make a plan in response to concerns regarding the child's welfare.

## **Embedding Family Group Decision Making across the system of help, support and protection**

Working Together and the National Framework set expectations for local areas to consider FGDM for a child and their family where they are receiving help, support or protection and also as a route to reunification with the birth parents or family network where appropriate. Where it is in the best interests of the child, local partnerships should ensure that the offer of FGDM is made as early as possible and repeat the offer as a child's needs and the support they receive changes. Local partnerships should consider how they embed FGDM to support the principles of right support at the right time, effective multi-agency child protection intervention, to prevent children entering the care system where possible and to support successful reunification where this is appropriate.

### **Expectations**

- ensure FHLPs identify a child's family network and engage them in decision making;
- offer FGDM through family help, multi-agency child protection and care and consider offering FGDM at every decision point, including at the point of reunification;
- consider how FHLPs can use the information about needs, any safeguarding concerns, risk or previous harm to inform decisions about wider family members who should be invited to engage in FGDM. MACPTs will operate as a local centre of child protection expertise and will provide consultancy and support across the system of help, support and protection. FHLPs will be able to consult with the MACPT on concerns about safety and wellbeing, including where FGDM is agreed;
- agree when offering FGDM would not be in the child's best interest and set this out in a transparent way in line with their local protocol for assessment and support required by Working Together;
- ensure family plans are integrated into, and given sufficient weight within, family help and child protection plans.



## Implementing Family Group Decision Making

Local authorities are best placed to understand the needs of their families and communities. This will inform how FGDM can be embedded within their end-to-end system. Local partnerships should develop an approach which is evidence-based, aligns with their practice framework, and is embedded within the integrated Family Help and multi-agency child protection system. FGDM should be defined with clear processes to ensure that the offer made to each family is high quality and practice is consistent. There should be clarity about how FHLPs, and where appropriate MACPTs, support FGDM and the role and responsibility of other practitioners who might facilitate FGDM. Suitable training should be provided to ensure FGDM facilitators have the knowledge, skills and experience to co-ordinate meetings safely and effectively. This should be included in the local partnership workforce plan.

Government does not mandate the use of a particular model for delivering FGDM. However, local partnerships should consider the strong evidence for the Family Group Conference (FGC) model of FGDM. In both domestic and international studies, FGCs have been shown to be highly effective in supporting families, improving decision-making processes and diverting children from care<sup>12</sup>.

Whether a local partnership adopts the FGC model or not, all areas should develop FGDM which is underpinned by these minimum requirements, informed by the evidence-based FGC approach:

### **1. Appointing a dedicated FGDM facilitator**

A designated Family Group Decision Making facilitator should be identified to coordinate and lead the FGDM process. It will be important to consider offering families the option of a facilitator who has had no previous involvement or decision making responsibility with the child or family. Emerging evidence from the Families First for Children Pathfinder has shown that some families value this independence and neutrality, and it can lead to better outcomes. In some cases, families may request that their FHLP facilitates FGDM. The FHLP, and where FGDM is facilitated during pre-proceedings, the MACPT should consider these requests, assess whether the family would benefit from having someone familiar to them and take into account the relationship between the FHLP and the family.

### **2. Preparation**

#### **a. Initial meeting with professionals**

The FGDM facilitator should work with the FHLP to discuss the child, their family, their history, and why the family is in need of help, support or protection. This will also include discussing why the family has reached pre-proceedings, where appropriate. They seek

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<sup>12</sup> [RCT of Family Group Conferencing at Pre-proceedings stage; Evaluation-of-SA-FGC-Final-Report-July-2024.pdf](#)

information about the child that will provide insight and understanding of their day-to-day life, relevant family information including previous and current contact with services and agencies and take into consideration known risks, previous or current concerns about harm and whether a child has been looked after by the local authority at any point.

#### **b. Pre-meetings with the parents and child, and planning the meeting**

Local authorities must actively seek the child's views at every stage of the process, except in exceptional circumstances where doing so would not be in the child's best interests. Special consideration should be given as to how best to access their views and experiences, and ensure appropriate participation of children with additional needs. The facilitator should work closely with the child's FHLP and other professionals to understand how their views can be best sought and expressed.

The facilitator should meet with the parents/those with parental responsibility and the child to introduce themselves, confirm there is informed consent, explain the FGDM process, understand more about the family's circumstances and work with them to identify people in the family network who could be invited to the FGDM meeting.

It will be important to consider the child and parents' views in determining who should be involved in FGDM. Factors to consider will include the best interest of the child, assessment of need and risk, creating a productive and effective environment and achieving best outcomes. Facilitators should consider whether safe and productive participation could be best achieved in different ways, such as through separate meeting, use of video conferencing, use of moderators or advocates, or if written views can be shared in the meeting. Individuals may be excluded from FGDM, including in relation to safeguarding concerns. Decision making should be explained in an appropriate way to the child.

The facilitator should explore with the child and their parents how they wish to be involved and how this could be facilitated appropriately, explaining any additional support that can be provided. The facilitator, alongside the FHLP where appropriate, should consider the child's age, understanding and viewpoint and take into consideration their wishes for participation. If the age and understanding of the child is appropriate the child should attend appropriate elements of the FGDM meeting. Consideration should be given to the child having an advocate or other forms of support to enable their participation.

Special consideration should be given as to how children with additional needs can participate in the meeting or have their views expressed.

#### **c. Co-designing and setting up the meeting**

The facilitator should meet with all family network members ahead of the meeting to discuss the purpose of the meeting, how it will run and ground rules. They will discuss if there are any additional needs or considerations that need to be put in place to ensure the meeting is accessible. This may include providing interpreters for any participants who require them, ensuring the venue is wheelchair accessible, offering information in



different formats or languages, or ensuring video conferencing facilities are available to enable remote participation.

Following risk assessments and consideration of the child and family network member's needs, how the meeting will take place and how certain members will contribute will be discussed and decided. For example, it may be decided that two meetings take place or that advocates are in place to support some attendees.

The facilitator will support the family to decide on a date and location of the FGDM meeting. This should be at a time, place and a venue to suit all of the family and, where possible, it should take place on 'neutral' ground (i.e. not at local authority or other agency offices).

#### **d. Facilitator's preparation meeting**

Shortly before the meeting takes place, the facilitator should meet with the FHLP, and the MACPT where appropriate, to discuss the FGDM meeting, ensure they have all the relevant information about the family, and to understand what help, support or protection the child needs and how the family network support can be integrated effectively into the Family Help and child protection plan to improve outcomes. They need to decide what key concerns the family's plan must address in order to ensure the child's wellbeing, including any considerations for keeping the child safe, so that these 'bottom lines' can be communicated clearly to the family network at the beginning of the meeting.

### **3. The FGDM meeting**

The purpose of the meeting is to create a plan for the child that addresses the local authority and family's concerns. This purpose should be clearly explained at the start of the meeting alongside the concerns for the child and the key requirements or 'bottom lines' that the plan needs to address to keep the child safe. Ground rules for the meeting must be established.

The meeting should give the family network adequate time to come up with their own plan to address the concerns for the child. During the meeting, the family and wider family network should be offered the opportunity to spend some time discussing the issues together without the presence of the facilitator or other practitioners, unless there are safeguarding concerns which would mean this might be considered inappropriate or unsafe.

After the plan has been created and agreed by the family network, the family network should share their plan with the facilitator, the FHLP and MACPT where appropriate. At the meeting, the FHLP will consider the plan against the key concerns and requirements as explained to the family network at the beginning of the meeting. If there are child protection concerns, the FHLP will also engage the MACPT. They should agree to the plan as long as it is legal, safe and addresses the key concerns.

The FHLP will seek the input of the Multi-disciplinary Family Help team, and the MACPT where this is needed, before it is agreed and signed off. If this is the case, a timeline will

be agreed for feeding back to the family. Once the plan is agreed, safeguarding partnerships should commit to providing the support contained in the plan to the family network.

The facilitator should make sure that everyone who attended the FGDM meeting has a copy of the plan and that the plan is recorded in the child's Family Help plan. A record of key decisions should be recorded during the meeting by the facilitator, and this may accompany the family plan in the local authority records for the family.

#### **4. Reviewing the plan**

The facilitator should make arrangements for the family network to review their plan within a reasonable and agreed time frame. At the review, the family network and practitioners meet to consider how the plan is working and if any circumstances have changed. FHLPs should also consider if the support that was offered as part of the plan has been delivered.

The child's safety, welfare and best interests is of paramount importance throughout this process. If the FHLP or MACPT believes that the child's circumstances or welfare needs have changed at any point during the pre-proceedings stage, such that court proceedings should be initiated immediately, then the local authority should proceed with making an application to the court to initiate care proceedings.

### **Family Group Decision Making and Safeguarding**

FGDM will be delivered with support from the FHLPs and the MACPT. Practitioners will have a detailed knowledge of the child and family, including safeguarding concerns, risks and harm. Pre-proceedings will only be initiated following a child protection process, where the FHLP and MACPT determine that there is not sufficient protection of the child by the parents. Understanding the child and family's history and drawing on the knowledge from both Family Help and the MACPT about the day-to-day life and experiences will be central to safe and effective FGDM. Children and their families experience a range of harms, and sometimes more than one at any given time. Harms might include domestic abuse, coercive or controlling behaviour, teenage relationship abuse, child sexual abuse, exploitation or other harms from outside the home. Planning for FGDM should take this into account to ensure safety and protection from harm.

FHLPs and the MACPT should consider whether it would be appropriate to exclude certain individuals from FGDM. This could include family network members and those with parental responsibility. It will be important to explore the significance of the adults in contact with the child and their family. Close attention should be paid to any serious criminal convictions, previous allegations of child abuse, domestic abuse or impulsive violent behaviour, restrictions on contact with children or involvement with children subject to child protection plans or care proceedings. It will also be important to recognise that previous contact with services or agencies may influence the way family network members engage with FGDM.

It will be important to consider what happens if threatening or disruptive behaviour arises during FGDM and what mitigations will be in place to manage this. FHLPs and MACPTs will bring expertise and oversight in assessing who should and should not engage with FGDM and how to create a safe environment. Where it is decided that individuals should not be at FGDM meetings, FHLPs and MACPTs should consider whether the views of the individual should be invited and taken into account as part of FGDM (for example, through a written statement). This decision should always promote the safety and welfare of the child and be in their best interests. Parents and carers should always be given the information, support and advice they need to understand what is happening, give informed consent and to fully participate in decision making where this is possible. Working Together sets out clear principles for working with parents, carers and families to build trust, confidence and respect. These principles should be embedded in FGDM. In some circumstances, family members may need support or advocacy to fully participate in FGDM. Safeguarding partnership should consider their local support offer to parents, carers and family networks.

If the FGDM process uncovers new information that the family or child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, the facilitator must raise this with the child's FHLP immediately and follow the local authority's safeguarding policies.

To support local authorities and all practitioners involved in FGDM, we are seeking to procure a package of best practice guidance and resources, drawing on research and case studies, to support safe and effective delivery of the process.

## **Offering Family Group Decision Making at pre-proceedings**

The pre-proceedings process acts as the final opportunity for parents to avoid care proceedings. It will be important for local safeguarding partnerships to consider the following practice principles when embedding Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) at pre-proceedings:

Parents and those with parental responsibility should be offered FGDM before an application is made to court for a care or supervision order, unless it is not in the child's best interests. FHLPs and MACPTs should work together to consider how the wider family is engaged as part of the integrated Family Help and Child Protection Plan. The FGDM offer should be made in the 'letter before proceedings.' Where the offer is accepted, FGDM should be arranged to help, support and protect children and their families, as needed. Working Together sets out guidance on pre-proceedings and safeguarding partnerships should consider this when setting up FGDM locally. This offer should be discussed with parents in the first pre-proceedings meeting, where written information should be provided on FGDM so that parents, or those with parental responsibility, can give informed consent. If parents' consent to FGDM, then steps to facilitate this should start immediately.

In offering FGDM at pre-proceedings, FHLPs and MACPTs should consider if this has been offered before, how successful it was in improving outcomes, the time that has elapsed since FGDM, and how the family's circumstances may have changed in light of moving into pre-proceedings. FHLPs, through their consistent relationship and knowledge of the child and their family, including the help and support in place, will be well placed to inform decisions about offering FGDM at this point. MACPTs will bring a sharp focus on protection and provide support including through the Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP). MACPTs will be well placed to ensure that FGDM aligns with current child protection interventions. Whether to offer FGDM should be discussed at the first legal planning meeting, with input from the FHLP and the MACPT. The decision and the rationale should be recorded and signed off by a senior manager and included in the court application for consideration by the judge. If the case does result in the initiation of court proceedings, FHLP and MACPTs should also consider how they can evidence the mandated offer of FGDM and any resulting actions to the court, for example, through the Social Work Evidence Template (SWET).

Where an offer is made, local authorities should provide sufficient time for parents or those with parental responsibility to consider their options, including the opportunity to seek legal advice or discuss the offer with family and friends. Local authorities should also ensure that the offer is presented in an accessible way, taking into account the individual needs of those receiving the offer. This could include considering any additional learning needs, disabilities, or communication requirements (for example, preparing information in alternative languages or formats). The local authority should provide appropriate support to ensure all recipients are able to fully understand the process and can come to an informed decision.

The FHLP should follow up within a reasonable time period to confirm a decision and engage with families to address any concerns or barriers that are preventing them from reaching a decision. Where delays persist, FHLPs with support from the MACPT should assess whether extending the timeframe remains in the child's best interests. The local authority should facilitate FGDM if it has been accepted by at least one individual to whom the offer was made.

## **When Family Group Decision Making might not be offered at pre-proceedings**

Many children have benefitted from FGDM at pre-proceedings, however, there will be situations where it may not be in the child's best interest. This could be because the child and those with parental responsibility have no significant relationship, or because all family network members have been assessed, and it would not be safe. The decision not to offer FGDM should be made taking into account the circumstances and needs of the child. Local areas should not adopt an approach that assumes blanket exemptions based on certain harm types or the family's history. Families are complex and whilst it may not be safe for a child to live with their family, for example due to domestic abuse or other

types of harm, for many children it will be important for them to remain in contact as part of understanding their history and identity. Where FGDM can support planning that promotes a child's wellbeing and safety, it should always be considered. Where the FHLP and MACPT determine that it is not appropriate to offer FGDM, the reason for this should always be shared with parents or those with parental responsibility.

### **Withdrawing the offer of Family Group Decision Making at pre-proceedings**

The offer of FGDM can be withdrawn at any time if it is no longer in the child's best interests. The decision to withdraw, and the rationale, should be recorded in the child's Family Help and child protection plan and signed off by a senior manager. If the FHLP and MACPT believe that the child's circumstances or needs have changed at any point during the pre-proceedings stage, such that court proceedings should be initiated immediately, then the application to the court should be made. Family work, including FGDM, should continue including when care proceedings have been initiated.

## Chapter 3: Families First Partnership Programme: key principles and system enablers

### The National Framework and Working Together to Safeguard Children

As local partnerships embark on this new phase of transformation, they should do so in line with the [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) and [Working Together: statutory guidance](#). The key principles of the National Framework should be used to support effective practice across the end-to-end system of help, support and protection. The National Framework provides detailed information which will help children, young people, and families to understand what to expect from children's social care when a local authority offers help, protection or care. The National Framework contains three chapters on enablers of good practice, which local partnerships should have in place to facilitate the great work that everyone wants to see with families. The guidance also includes a strong expectation that improving outcomes relies on responding to the voices of children, young people and families. The National Framework is supported by the [Children's Social Care Dashboard](#), which captures data on key indicators and allows local partnerships to see the progress they are making towards the outcomes expected.

Working Together sets out expectations for every individual, agency and organisation that works with children and their families. It applies at every level. The guidance clarifies the role of safeguarding partners and relevant agencies such as education and childcare settings, and the importance of multi-agency, whole family working in system transformation, including through the principles for working with parents and carers, new multi-agency expectations and the national multi-agency child protection standards. Working Together outlines that safeguarding partners are required to publish a yearly report to ensure local scrutiny and accountability which includes an assessment of the effectiveness of local arrangements, learning, and spend.

### Information Sharing

#### Data

Local agencies should share data relating to children and families across their local safeguarding partnership. This is to enable local agencies to identify families requiring support, track needs and outcomes over time and provide practitioners with the latest information to inform their work.

A senior strategic group with representation across the partnership should drive the use of data for the whole system. Data should be shared across education and childcare settings, police, health, Department for Work and Pensions, housing, Youth Offending Teams, prisons, and probation. This requires agreement of robust information governance arrangements including Data Sharing Agreements, Data Protection Impact Assessments, protocols and training staff in the use of data. Local partnerships should share information for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

### **Information sharing and consistent identifiers – Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

Measures to improve data sharing between agencies to better safeguard and support children and families are included in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill. An information sharing duty that provides a clear legal basis to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promotion of welfare, and provision to enable the specification of a consistent identifier (also known as ‘Single Unique Identifier’).

Areas should develop appropriate infrastructure for sharing, storing and analysing information. This could be bringing together and matching data in a data warehouse or data lake. Areas should consider using common data standards to enable sharing. Local partnerships should make use of tools to analyse needs and risks across the system and report these insights across the partnership. Single digital view systems provide a way to share data with practitioners to inform their work. Local partnerships are encouraged to explore AI tools to support the workforce and highlight risk while being aware of possible biases and limitations of this technology.

### **Case management system changes**

The introduction of Family Help may require changes to your case management systems (CMS). These include:

- bringing together targeted early help cases and child in need cases in the same system;
- introducing a single assessment and workflow for these two groups;
- extending proportionate access to all partners working with families, particularly those who take a lead practitioner role.

The department will set out further expectations and good practice on CMS requirements and system changes – including planned data collections. Local partnerships are encouraged to work in partnership with other areas to make best use of technical support.



## Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

Delivering an effective system of help, support and protection for children and their families is a shared responsibility. There should be greater consistency and accountability across all multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA), so that leaders at the right level are making the right decisions for local children and their families.

Effective multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are foundational to successful reform and improving outcomes for children and families. It is critical that the statutory safeguarding partners, and relevant agencies like education and childcare settings, work together to deliver and embed change.

All safeguarding partners have been implementing changes set out in Working Together including to:

- set out **lead (strategic oversight and accountability) and delegated (operational delivery) safeguarding partner** roles, responsibilities and joint functions across local authorities, health and the police;
- introduce a **Partnership Chair** to facilitate discussions, encourage consistency and provide a clear mechanism for escalation;
- ensure a clear system of **independent scrutiny** to provide rigour and challenge.

Safeguarding partners should establish clear, equitable and effective safeguarding arrangements and embed a clear line of sight between strategy and practice. Given the key role they play in children's lives, all education and childcare settings should be engaged and consulted as strategic partners in local safeguarding arrangements.

All safeguarding partners have been implementing Working Together to strengthen the role of education at the operational and strategic levels of local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Lead and delegated safeguarding partners should work together with all education and childcare settings to create an environment where they are engaged, included and involved in safeguarding arrangements by:

- establishing or adapting education forums with representatives from across the education sector, from early years and childcare settings through to further education and colleges, including academies, alternative provision, and independent schools. The full list of relevant agencies are set out in [The Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Relevant Agency \(England\) Regulations 2018](#);
- identifying representatives who can provide a voice for education settings locally to enable effective inclusion and representation for education at operational and strategic decision-making levels of the MASA.



Safeguarding partners are encouraged to automatically include all education and safeguarding settings in their multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and that they work together with these settings to identify and respond to the needs of children in their area.

### **Strengthening the role of education and MASA – Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

A measure to place duties on safeguarding partners (local authorities, police and health) to secure the participation of education and childcare settings as relevant agencies as well as ensure that their views are sufficiently included and represented at strategic and operational levels in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. The aim of this measure is to strengthen the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to better protect children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Families First for Children Pathfinder local partnerships have been testing a strengthened role for education as a strategic partner in their local arrangements. Learning and best practice will be shared from the pathfinder areas, along with learning from implementation of statutory guidance nationally to support local partnerships.

## **Delivering evidence based interventions**

The Children's Social Care National Framework highlights the importance of promoting evidence-based approaches to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. Local leaders should use evidence to inform and improve how services are commissioned and delivered in their local area.

In order to enable local partnerships to access information on the best available evidence, the department have commissioned a series of [Practice Guides](#), from Foundations - the What Works Centre for Children & Families. Practice Guides set out high quality evidence about how best to achieve the outcomes set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework and translates this into key principles and recommendations to support local leaders in strengthening family services. Local partnerships should look to Practice Guides as a key source for guidance on the latest evidence from Foundations - the What Works Centre for Children & Families. Practice Guides set out high quality evidence about how best to achieve the outcomes set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework and translates this into key principles and recommendations to support local leaders in strengthening family services. Local partnerships should look to Practice Guides as a key source for guidance on the latest evidence.

[Foundations](#) will be publishing more Practice Guides to support local leaders to deliver the responsibilities outlined in the National Framework.

## **What are evidence based interventions?**

There are a range of evidence-based interventions (EBIs) that have been proven to be effective through rigorous impact evaluation. These EBIs provide the most reliable way to improve child and family outcomes and strengthen the consistency and quality of Family Help services. EBIs focus on increasing practitioners' knowledge of scientifically proven theories of change and provide effective methods for engaging families experiencing vulnerabilities.

Leaders should consider embedding EBIs in their approach, commissioning and delivery of system transformation.

## **Supporting local evidence use**

Local partnerships should aim to provide a range of evidence-based interventions suitable for children of different ages and different levels of family need. In order to inform decisions about which interventions would best suit local need and the wider local context, local leaders review and update their population needs assessment and joint strategic needs assessment as part of co-designing and implementing Family Help.

## Chapter 4: Families First Partnership Programme – national delivery support offer

The Families First Partnership Programme will provide all local safeguarding partners with support and direction to implement reforms. The department will work closely with local partnerships to support delivery of the programme in the following ways:

1. work in partnership with local areas based on strong relationships, and clear and honest communication, taking a collaborative approach to overcome challenges;
2. resource and recognise the value of local co-design and implementation where partners, children, young people and families work together to build joined up services that meet the needs of local communities;
3. share learning nationally and facilitate sector-led support;
4. keep oversight and monitoring arrangements proportionate, to enable central government to understand delivery progress and impact, whilst not impeding on local delivery.

Further detail on delivery expectations and support for the programme can be found in the [Grant Determination Letter](#) for the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant and in the document 'Planning for Implementation'.

### Working in partnership with local areas

The FFP Area Engagement Team will provide a single point of contact and support for each local area. They will engage directly with local authorities and their partners as well as on a regional footprint. To help support these relationships all local authorities should have a named senior lead to manage the running of the programme and a Senior Practice Lead responsible for the design and delivery of implementation.

### Local co-design and implementation

Local partners best understand the needs and challenges of their areas, and designing and implementing reforms to meet these needs takes time and resource. As such the grant determination letter sets an expectation that local authorities reserve some funding for transformation. Based on learning from the Families First for Children Pathfinder this may be around 30%. Examples of how funding was used by the Pathfinders include, to meaningfully engage children and families in co-designing the end to end system, and agreeing secondment arrangements with partners to support multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working. Both of these helped with the design of integrated and effective services that felt more welcoming to families. Local partners may also want to consider how resources could be pooled to support regional or sub regional approaches to transformation. All areas will have time to carry out this design process and will complete a delivery plan for their reformed services.

During the design and implementation phase, areas should build on their strengths, and support transformation across the core areas set out in the National Framework enablers of good practice and in line with the requirements of Working Together. Alongside this, areas will be supported to improve and update case management systems and data sharing to enable reforms.

## **Learning and sector-led support**

The FFP programme will share learning from the pathfinder areas, along with best practice and best evidence from across children's social care including Foundations and other specialist organisations. These will include 'How to' guides providing examples and support on how to design and implement reforms, along with webinars and other publications. There will be a national digital platform hosted by the Local Government Association's [Knowledge Hub](#) to enable local partners to access learning and resources. More details will be shared shortly.

The programme will also place sector-led support at the core of its offer, using existing regional and direct support offers for areas to discuss and work through opportunities and challenges posed by the reforms.

We are also seeking to procure a package of best practice guidance and resources, drawing on research and case studies, for local authorities and practitioners, to support the safe and effective delivery of the FGDM process.

## **Proportionate Oversight and monitoring**

The department will aim to balance the need to understand delivery progress and impact of reforms, and to see if the programme is meeting its aims. Further detail of monitoring expectations can be found in the Grant Determination Letter, this includes sharing updates on progress and data. Where possible the department will use available data, and any new collection will be conducted quarterly starting in June 2025. The department will also ask local authorities to submit additional data on the children, young people and families receiving Family Help to measure outcomes as part of evaluating the impact of the reforms. This will be proportionate, and the department will only collect data that is not included in existing data returns. The long-term aim is to integrate and simplify data collections.



Department  
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