

The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide

Delivery expectations for safeguarding partners in England. March 2025

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Overview

The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme aims to transform family support and multi-agency child protection in England. This, **The Families First Partnership Programme Guide** outlines delivery expectations for safeguarding partners in England, and aims to support the implementation of Family Help, multi-agency child protection reforms, and Family Group decision-making.

The rollout of these reforms aims to deliver on the government's ***Plan for Change***, which aims to provide children with the best start in life and break down barriers to opportunity. The Plan for Change includes working across government to ensure every child is kept safe from multiple forms of abuse and harm and tackling child poverty.

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

Vision and Objectives

The programme's vision is to create a seamless system of Family Help and multi-agency child protection. It emphasises early intervention, multi-disciplinary teams, and the integration of services to support families effectively. The goal is to prevent crises, reduce the number of children in care, and improve outcomes for families.

The guide is not statutory and does not replace existing statutory guidance. It describes the programme's vision and objectives and sets out the practice changes the government expects to see to improve the support provided to children and their families.

In the guide, the term 'children and young people' refers to individuals up to the age of 25, where some young adults will continue to receive support from children's social care as care leavers or through education, health, and care plans.

The guide will be followed by further implementation and 'how to' guides on specific aspects of reform as part of our ongoing delivery support offer. Safeguarding partners and other relevant agencies are asked to consider how changes may work based on their specific local context.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, introduced on December 17, 2024, aims to break the link between background and future success. Key policy changes include:

- **Family Group Decision Making (FGDM):** Mandates local authorities to offer a family group decision-making meeting before applying for a care or supervision order, allowing families to create a plan in response to concerns about a child's welfare.
- **Multi-agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs):** Requires statutory safeguarding partners (local authorities, police, and health) to establish MACPTs to support local authorities in child protection duties, with relevant agencies facilitating their operation.
- **Strengthening the Role of Education:** Places duties on statutory safeguarding partners to make education and childcare settings relevant agencies by default, ensuring their participation in safeguarding and representation at strategic and operational levels.
- **Information Sharing and Consistent Identifiers:** Introduces an information-sharing duty to improve data sharing between agencies for safeguarding and welfare promotion, and provisions for a consistent identifier (Single Unique Identifier).

These measures aim to enhance multi-agency collaboration, improve data sharing, and ensure education settings play a central role in safeguarding children.

Investment to Support Local Areas

Outlines the funding structure, including the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant (£270 million) and the Children and Families Grant (£253.5 million) to support local authorities in implementing the programme.

Key Principles

Emphasises adherence to the Children’s Social Care National Framework and Working Together guidance. It underscores the importance of multi-agency working, evidence-based interventions, and robust information-sharing protocols.

Implementation Support

- Over £500 million in funding provided for FY25-26 through the Local Government Finance Settlement.
- Support from the FFP Area Engagement Team and resources for local co-design and implementation.
- Emphasis on learning, accountability, and sector-led support.

Legislative and Policy Changes

The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill introduces measures to mandate FGDM, establish MACPTs, and strengthen the role of education in safeguarding.

Improved data sharing and consistent identifiers to enhance support and protection

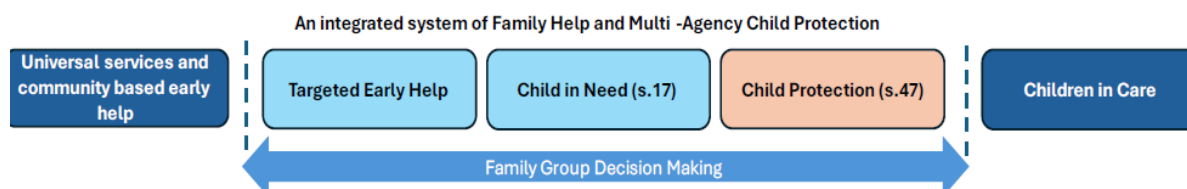
Summary

Chapter 1: A transformation in family support

The Families First Partnership (FFP) programme aims to transform the system of family support by emphasising early intervention to prevent crises and ensuring every family can access the right help when needed. It promotes collaboration among various partners and agencies, including voluntary and community organisations, to address diverse needs such as disabilities, mental health issues, domestic abuse, and exploitation. The programme advocates for a whole-family approach, understanding the needs of both children and adults and maintaining relationships to avoid families being passed between teams and children having to share their stories with multiple people. The goal is to provide integrated, dynamic, and responsive support that adapts to changing needs, facilitating continuous assessment and planning rather than a stop/start approach.

Figure 1 shows how different support and services can operate together to wrap help and support around families and adapt as needs change.

Figure 1: Our vision for a reformed system



Vision for Family Help and multi-agency child protection

The Families First Partnership (FFP) programme aims to integrate targeted early help, child in need, and multi-agency child protection into a seamless system of support. This vision includes

collaboration among family support workers, social workers, and other specialists to provide comprehensive support to families. The goal is to prevent the escalation of issues and reduce the need for child protection investigations by offering early intervention and maintaining consistent relationships with families.

Interaction with universal services and community-based early help

Universal services and community-based early help, such as family hubs, youth services, and routine health and housing provision, play a crucial role in identifying emerging problems and providing early support. The FFP programme encourages local areas to build on these strengths and integrate them into the Family Help system. Voluntary and community services are also vital in reaching families who may be wary of or unaware of local services.

Education and childcare settings and attendance

Education and childcare settings often have strong relationships with families and can identify when help or protection is needed. They can offer direct support, connect families with local services, and monitor progress. Attendance data is a key early-warning indicator of need, and partnerships should consider how to factor severely absent pupils into local eligibility decisions for Family Help.

Keeping Families Together – Reunification and Family Group Decision-Making

Family Help supports children returning safely to their families from care, promoting stable, long-lasting relationships. Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) empowers families to develop plans for reunification, ensuring children can return home safely. Local partnerships should use data to support robust planning and preparation for reunification.

Chapter 2: Delivery Expectations

Chapter 2 sets out the expectations for practice and areas of local flexibility to support safeguarding partners in planning their transformation activity. It covers Family Help, Multi-agency Child Protection, and Family Group Decision Making, detailing the roles and responsibilities of Family Help Lead Practitioners and Multi-disciplinary Family Help Teams

Section 1: Family Help

Identifying Need for Family Help

Family Help is for children, young people, and families with multiple and/or complex needs that go beyond universal and community-based early help. Families consent to assessment and support unless there are child protection concerns. Indicators for Family Help include mental health issues, substance misuse, domestic abuse, neglect, and various forms of exploitation.

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

Family Help aims to align targeted early help and child in need support into a seamless system, removing barriers and ensuring timely support. This includes maintaining consistent relationships and using single assessments and plans that adapt to changing needs.

Family Help Lead Practitioner

Family Help Lead Practitioners (FHLPs) are practitioners from various disciplines who support families with multiple and/or complex needs. They build strong relationships, coordinate support, and work with multi-agency child protection teams when necessary. FHLPs should have the knowledge, skills, and experience to address the unique needs of families.

Multi-disciplinary Family Help Teams

Multi-disciplinary teams wrap support around families, addressing a range of needs through collaboration among practitioners from different backgrounds. These teams should be based on population needs assessments and include practitioners from various services such as mental health, domestic abuse, and youth justice.

Family Help Assessment and Plans

Family Help aims for one assessment and plan that evolves with the family, capturing new information and adapting to changing needs. Assessments should be tailored to the level of need and coordinated with other ongoing assessments.

Front Door Arrangements

Local partnerships should integrate front door arrangements to triage contacts and referrals, ensuring families receive the right support at the right time. This includes considering the range of practitioners and agencies involved and promoting engagement through accessible and de-stigmatizing approaches.

Section 2: Multi-agency Child Protection

A Seamless System of Help, Support and Protection

Multi-agency child protection should be integrated within Family Help, protecting children from significant harm inside and outside the home. Family Help Lead Practitioners (FHLs) continue their role with families throughout child protection activity, supported by multi-agency child protection teams (MACPTs).

Establishing Multi-agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs)

MACPTs are expert-led teams that support local authorities in discharging their child protection duties. These teams include dedicated social workers, police officers, health practitioners, and education experts. They carry out specific child protection functions such as leading section 47 enquiries and developing child protection plans.

Functions of the Multi-agency Child Protection Teams

MACPTs chair strategy meetings, lead section 47 enquiries, oversee investigations, and develop child protection plans. They provide advice and consultation, maintain oversight of children on child protection plans, and support transitions out of child protection.

Embedding the Lead Child Protection Practitioner Role

Lead Child Protection Practitioners (LCPPs) are experienced social workers embedded in MACPTs, responsible for statutory child protection decisions. They work with families, identify significant harm, and ensure child protection expertise across the system.

Responding to Local Needs and Harms

MACPTs should be equipped to respond to various harm types, including domestic abuse, exploitation, and harm outside the home. They should understand the specific needs of vulnerable groups such as babies and teenagers and ensure practice is inclusive and anti-discriminatory.

Responding to Significant Harm Outside the Home

Children can experience harm in extra-familial contexts such as schools, peer groups, and online. MACPTs should tailor their response to these contexts, working collaboratively with parents, carers, and community partners to create safety.

Information, Support and Advice for Parents and Carers

Parents and carers involved in child protection need high-quality information, advice, and support. Local partnerships should build positive relationships with parents, provide clear information about the child protection process, and adapt responses to meet diverse needs.

Section 3: Family Group Decision Making

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

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) should be integrated at every point in the system, from Family Help to multi-agency child protection and care. This approach ensures families are empowered to make plans for their children's safety and wellbeing. Local partnerships should offer FGDM as early as possible and repeat the offer as needs change. Family Help Lead Practitioners (FHLPs) should identify and engage a child's family network in decision-making, ensuring family plans are integrated into Family Help and child protection plans.

Implementing Family Group Decision Making

Local partnerships should develop an evidence-based approach to FGDM, aligning with their practice framework and ensuring high-quality, consistent practice. Key steps include:

1. Appointing a dedicated FGDM facilitator: Facilitators should coordinate and lead the FGDM process, with the option of offering families a facilitator with no previous involvement for neutrality.
2. Preparation: This involves initial meetings with professionals, pre-meetings with parents and children, and planning the meeting. Facilitators should gather relevant information, seek the child's views, and ensure the meeting is accessible and productive.
3. The FGDM meeting: The meeting aims to create a plan addressing the local authority and family's concerns. The family network should have time to discuss and develop their plan, which is then reviewed and agreed upon by the FHLP and MACPT.
4. Reviewing the plan: The facilitator should arrange for the family network to review their plan within an agreed timeframe, ensuring the child's safety and welfare are paramount.

Family Group Decision Making and Safeguarding

FGDM should be delivered with support from FHLPs and MACPTs, who have detailed knowledge of the child and family. Practitioners should consider the child's history, safeguarding concerns, and risks. FGDM should account for various harms, such as domestic abuse and exploitation, and exclude individuals if necessary for safety. Parents and carers should receive information, support, and advocacy to participate fully in FGDM.

Offering Family Group Decision Making at pre-proceedings

FGDM should be offered before applying to court for a care or supervision order, unless not in the child's best interests. The offer should be made in the 'letter before proceedings' and discussed in the first pre-proceedings meeting. FHLPs and MACPTs should consider previous

FGDM offers and the family's current circumstances. The decision to offer FGDM should be recorded and included in the court application.

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

FGDM may not be offered if it is not in the child's best interests, such as when there is no significant relationship with those with parental responsibility or safety concerns. Decisions should be based on the child's circumstances and needs, avoiding blanket exemptions. The rationale for not offering FGDM should 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 if it is no longer in the child's best interests. The decision and rationale should be recorded in the child's Family Help and child protection plan. If circumstances change, court proceedings should be initiated immediately, but family work, including FGDM, should continue.

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

This chapter discusses the key principles and system enablers for the Families First Partnership Programme, including the National Framework and Working Together to Safeguard Children^[1]. It emphasizes the importance of information sharing, multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and delivering evidence-based interventions.

The National Framework and Working Together to Safeguard Children

Local partnerships should align with the Children's Social Care National Framework and Working Together statutory guidance. These documents provide principles and expectations for effective practice across the system of help, support, and protection. The National Framework includes enablers of good practice and emphasizes responding to the voices of children, young people, and families. Working Together outlines the roles of safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, emphasizing multi-agency, whole-family working.

Information Sharing

Local agencies should share data relating to children and families to identify needs, track outcomes, and inform practice. This requires robust information governance arrangements, including Data Sharing Agreements and protocols. Local partnerships should develop infrastructure for sharing, storing, and analysing information, using tools like data warehouses and AI to support the workforce.

Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

Effective multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are crucial for successful reform and improving outcomes. Safeguarding partners should establish clear roles, responsibilities, and joint functions, with a Partnership Chair to facilitate discussions and independent scrutiny for rigour. Education and childcare settings should be engaged as strategic partners in safeguarding arrangements.

Delivering evidence-based interventions

Local leaders should use evidence-based interventions (EBIs) to improve outcomes for children and families. The department has commissioned Practice Guides from Foundations - the What

Works Centre for Children & Families, which provide high-quality evidence and recommendations. Local partnerships should embed EBIs in their approach, commissioning, and delivery of system transformation.

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

The final chapter outlines the national delivery support offer for the Families First Partnership Programme. It details the support provided by the Department for Education, including partnership working, local co-design and implementation, learning and sector-led support, and proportionate oversight and monitoring.

The Families First Partnership Programme provides support and direction to local safeguarding partners for implementing reforms. The department will work closely with local partnerships, offering:

1. Partnership with local areas: The FFP Area Engagement Team will provide support and engage with local authorities and partners.
2. Local co-design and implementation: Local partners should reserve funding for transformation, engaging children and families in co-designing services.
3. Learning and sector-led support: The programme will share learning from pathfinder areas and best practice, providing 'How to' guides, webinars, and a national digital platform for resources.
4. Proportionate oversight and monitoring: The department will balance the need to understand delivery progress and impact with not impeding local delivery. Monitoring expectations are detailed in the Grant Determination Letter, with data collections starting in June 2025.

Acronyms Used

Acronyms and their meanings from the document:

- **FFP:** Families First Partnership
- **FGDM:** Family Group Decision Making
- **FHLP:** Family Help Lead Practitioner
- **MACPT:** Multi-agency Child Protection Team
- **LCPP:** Lead Child Protection Practitioner
- **FFC:** Families First for Children
- **LGFS:** Local Government Finance Settlement
- **SEND:** Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- **EHC:** Education Health and Care
- **NEET:** Not in Education, Employment, or Training

- **TAF:** Team Around the Family
- **VRU:** Violence Reduction Unit
- **CMS:** Case Management System
- **MASA:** Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements
- **EBI:** Evidence-Based Intervention
- **ILACS:** Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services
- **JTAI:** Joint Targeted Area Inspection
- **PLO:** Public Law Outline
- **SWET:** Social Work Evidence Template