



Department
for Education

Families First for Children Pathfinder: Wave 2

Summary Design Specification

October 2023

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Introduction

1. This document is to support Local Authorities (LAs) in applying to become one of the local areas in wave 2 of the Families First for Children pathfinder (FFC Pathfinder).
2. This is one of four documents published to support applicants. The documents for applicants are:
 - **The summary design specification** – this document provides an overview of what successful applicants are expected to implement in their local areas.
 - **The application guide** – a document setting out the FFC Pathfinder and the application process for wave 2, including details of the background, aims and objectives, funding and eligibility criteria.
 - **The application form** – a document which must be completed and submitted within the application window for an application to be considered.
 - **The costed plan template** – a document to be completed and submitted alongside the application form with the application window.

Please read these documents carefully before completing the application form.

Background to the Pathfinder reforms

3. In May 2022, the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care (Care Review) published its [final report](#), calling for bold reforms across the whole of the children’s social care system. In the same month, The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) published [Child Protection in England](#) - a national review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson. The Care Review made radical recommendations on how we improve support for children and their families

throughout the early help system and children's social care, including kinship care. Both the Care Review and the Panel also made major recommendations for child protection and safeguarding partners.

4. The Government published [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#) in February 2023 - an implementation strategy and consultation to respond to the national reviews. In this we set out our plans to transform early help and children's social care (also described here as 'family support and protection'). The FFC Pathfinder is a core commitment made in the strategy.
5. Whilst our proposals are ambitious and focused on transforming the system, they will not develop in isolation from wider, existing work. They will be informed by existing programmes and guidance (for example the Supporting Families Programme, [Family Hubs](#) with its [Supporting Families: Early Help System Guide and the Family Hubs Programme](#)), as well as the wider reforms in Stable Homes, Built on Love (such as the new [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) and updated [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) guidance) to create a system of seamless support for families. *Please note that Working Together 2023 will be published by the end of 2023 and aspects of this design specification may be subject to change to align with the final guidance.*

Overview of pathfinder reforms

6. **There are four key reform strands to the pathfinder that selected areas will design and test as a whole system transformation:**
 - **Overarching system-level reform, including multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA).** Local statutory safeguarding partners will need to be fully bought into the pathfinder to lead and deliver these reforms. We want to see some changes to how they operate, with clear roles and responsibilities at both strategic and operational levels; and an increased - and possibly statutory - role for education.
 - **Family help.** We want to establish locally-based, multi-disciplinary family help services that work collaboratively with partners to provide welcoming, seamless and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families. This will bring together targeted early help and child in need support provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.
 - **Child protection.** We want dedicated and skilled multi-agency child protection teams comprising practitioners from a range of disciplines, including social workers with greater child protection expertise and experience; and work to improve families' engagement with and experiences of child protection processes – including via parental representation.
 - **Family networks.** We want participating local areas make greater use of family networks, with earlier use of family group decision-making throughout the reformed system. We also want to provide targeted funding in Family Network Support Packages (FNSPs) to enable more children to live safely at home, or support a transition into kinship care.

Pathfinder design, testing and learning

7. **We are working through a range of issues and opportunities with the Wave 1 pathfinder areas and the wider sector via co-design and the ‘test and learn’ phase.**
8. **Co-design with Wave 1 areas runs until end October, followed by a review and reflection period in November.** It will inform both policy and delivery aspects of the future system, including Wave 2 of the programme; and influence what we evaluate. It involves national government, local authorities and partners and children and families.
9. **Following their co-design period, Wave 1 areas will test implementation of the reforms to inform any further rollout.** Government, pathfinder areas and the sector will continue to change and improve the programme based on learning from this phase and will seek to understand and build on existing best practice in the wider sector. We will create ‘learning loops’ to support this.
10. **We will also capture and share learning via informal and formal evaluation** (the former undertaken by our delivery partner and the latter by our independent evaluator). This will be used to support non-pathfinder areas to move towards system reform, should they wish to do so.
11. **Key features of each strand of the reform and a summary of our minimum policy expectations for Pathfinder areas are set out below.**
12. Our detailed policy design specification, which will be shared with wave 2 pathfinder areas once selected, sets out our full ‘minimum expectations’, as well as areas for local variation and flexibility.

Overarching system reform

Key features

13. Establish a system-wide, **‘families first’ culture**, which addresses structural inequalities, attends to the full spectrum of families’ contexts and needs, and facilitates a **welcoming and effective** system for children and families.
14. Clarify and strengthen **multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASAs)**, ways of working and independent scrutiny. This includes strengthening the **role of education** in MASA at strategic level.
15. Streamline and support **effective multi-agency information sharing** and case management systems.

Minimum expectations

16. **Involve, gather and act on feedback from children and young people, families, and communities** in designing and testing the pathfinder. Use evidence-based practice (including ethical considerations) in doing so.

17. **Develop, communicate and use accessible, neutral and strengths-based language** with families involved with the reformed system.
18. **Identify Lead Safeguarding Partners** as the LA Chief Executive, Chief Officer of Police and Chief Executive of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) (or member of the ICB executive group).
19. Lead Safeguarding Partners are expected to identify and name **Delegate Safeguarding Partners**.
20. **Appoint a Partnership Chair** at Delegated Safeguarding Partner level (agreed by all three partners) that escalates issues to the Lead Safeguarding Partners.
21. Ensure a separate, independent and accountable **system of scrutiny** is in place for MASA.
22. Ensure **all safeguarding partners allocate shared, equitable and adequate funding** to MASA and spend it in line with agreed priorities.
23. **Develop and test formal models of engaging education** at the strategic level of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.
24. Ensure that case management and information sharing processes can **facilitate timely and appropriate information sharing** across partners.

Family help

Key features

25. Establish a **multi-disciplinary family help team** to provide seamless support for families, spanning targeted early help and child in need (section 17 of the Children Act 1989).
26. **Integrate family help** within existing systems and services.
27. Deliver an integrated **'front door'** and service that is welcoming, effectively identifies families' strengths and needs and decides on the **appropriate lead practitioner** for a family.
28. **Establish the Family Help Lead Practitioner (FHLP) role**. This should be whoever is best placed to provide this role for the family and can include practitioners not employed by the LA.
29. **Establish clear thresholds** and a single, family help **assessment** and **plan** for families.
30. Establish proportionate plans for **case management, oversight and supervision**, considering increasing and decreasing needs over time.

Minimum expectations

31. Establish a core multi-disciplinary **family help team** led by the LA. The core service will include a practice supervisor/manager, social workers and family support workers and areas will determine who else should be involved.
32. Align family help with local **SEND services** (e.g. ensure existing disabled children and wider SEND teams are appropriately embedded).
33. Clarify what strategic and systemic integration with **family hubs** looks like (e.g., exploring the relationship between the 'front door' and family hub 'single point of access').
34. Establish methods for actively engaging, involving and building partnerships with **voluntary and community sector (VCS)** organisations (e.g., VCS Alliance model), including in strategy and system design.
35. **Involve family group decision making (FGDM) coordinators in family engagement.**
36. Establish and publicise an accessible, '**front door**' into family help (and other services) which ensures families are swiftly allocated to the correct part of the system.
37. Clarify the process for **threshold decisions and allocation** for practitioners. This will include, where the section 47 threshold is met, requiring allocation to both a lead child protection practitioner and family help lead practitioner - and where section 47 threshold is not met, meaning allocation to family help to determine what further assessment/support may be required.
38. Establish how to develop a strengths-based, whole family **assessment** for all families that removes duplication of targeted early help and child in need assessments for families in family help, to create a **single 'family help assessment'** that feeds into a **single 'family help plan'** for the family.
39. Establish a plan for proportionate **oversight and supervision** across family help cases, carried out by a senior practitioner with appropriate knowledge and skills for the specific case.

Child protection

Key features

40. Establish the **Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP)** role, underpinned by clear skills, responsibilities, processes co-working with family help, supervision and case oversight.
41. Operationalise a **multi-agency child protection team (MACPT)**, secure dedicated resource across agencies and clarify its' core functions.

42. Improve parents' experiences and engagement with child protection, including through independent **parental representation**.

Minimum expectations

43. Develop the role and the responsibilities of the **Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP)**.

44. **Test the feasibility of the LCPP chairing child protection conferences** to understand benefits and challenges for decision making, and how this affects parents' and children's experiences.

45. Determine how **supervision, coaching and support** arrangements around case work will work between the LCPP and FHLP.

46. Establish robust **supervision** arrangements which are focused on practice (working with families and identifying risk), rather than process.

47. Establish a **multi-agency child protection team**. Core members to include children's social care, health (needs dependent e.g. mental health, health visitor for vulnerable infants), police and education, with clear resourcing agreements in place. The team will be responsible for child protection resulting from **intra- and extra- familial harm** – as such, the team will need to be equipped to respond to the full spectrum of children and young people (vulnerable infants, adolescents, those living away from home) and harms (e.g. domestic abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation).

48. Develop a clear strategy for **engaging with parents** in child protection to ensure they are supported and helped to understand the process, outcomes and how they can be supported to make changes. To include clarity about the information and support that is provided at each stage, how parents can raise concerns and how feedback about experiences is gathered.

49. Test **involvement of family and representatives** in child protection conferences.

50. Test **timing of family group decision making (FGDM)** in the child protection process.

Family networks

Key features

51. **Establish family networks as a 'golden thread'** throughout the reformed system.

52. **Align family group decision making (FGDM)/conferencing (FGC) with family help and child protection processes.**

53. Test provision of practical and financial support via **Family Network Support Packages (FNSP)**.

Minimum expectations

54. Offer **family group decision-making (FGDM)** to all families by default. It should be facilitated by an **independent coordinator** and families should be given space for private family time.
55. Make family engagement in FGDM a pre-requisite to accessing **Family Network Support Packages (FNSPs)** for any cohort (e.g. family help, child protection, and pre-proceedings).
56. Offer all families at pre-proceedings **family group conferencing (FGC)** in line with the principles of the specific FGC model - [FGC Accreditation - Family Rights Group \(frg.org.uk\)](http://frg.org.uk).
57. Establish an approach to **child protection conferences** which is empowering, strengths-based and organised in a way which harnesses the contributions of wider family networks.
58. Provide **practical support and funding to family networks via FNSPs** when (i) a child has a suitable family network but (ii) there is a barrier to them stepping in and providing support, that could otherwise be resolved through financial and practical help from the local authority.
59. **FNSPs** must meet the bespoke needs of this individual family, and not reflect a “one size fits all” approach (e.g., a blanket allowance, a salary for an employed practitioner, or a pre-made package of services).



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