

## Delegated Officer Report

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	<b>Gerard Jones, Managing Director Children and Young People</b>
<b>Date of Decision:</b>	<b>2 August 2022</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Family Decision Making Team</b>
<b>Report Author:</b>	<b>Bruce Penhale, Assistant Director Family Connect</b>
<b>Ward (s):</b>	N/A

---

---

**Reason for the decision:** The report seeks to extend the fixed term contracts of the Family Decision Making team to 30 June 2023, and to implement a system for assuring the outcomes and quality of the work.

**Summary:** Family Decision Making involves working with families to meet the needs of a child(ren) by creating a family plan to be delivered by the family and their extended network of family and friends. This is achieved through a family group conferencing process, wherever possible also involving the children. Oldham has a Family Decision Making Team of 6 staff who deliver this work, of which five have contracts ending on 31 December 2022. The report sets out proposals to:

- Extend the contracts to 30 June 2023 using funding from the Reform Investment Fund, with continuation beyond that point to be reviewed in February 2023;
- Transfer the management of the team into the Family Connect service linked to a refocusing of the work at a lower level of need in order to increase the number of families successfully worked with; and
- Strengthen the performance management and quality assurance arrangements for the Team's work.

Further details are set out in Appendix 1.

***What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):***

**Option A** Do not extend the contracts of the Family Decision Making Team

**Option B** Extend the contracts of the Family Decision Making team to 30/6/2023, and move the service to be part of the Family Connect service with

an associated refocusing of the level of need at which the team work.

Option B is recommended. Not extending the contracts would discontinue the use of the Family Decision Making model in Oldham and mean that team members would need to be redeployed or made redundant. Moving the team from Children's Social Care into the Family Connect Service will assist in refocusing the work at a lower level of need which will assist in increasing the number of plans successfully implemented.

Reviewing the outcomes of the team in February 2023 will provide an opportunity to assess whether to extend the role of the Team in the longer term, having put in place a stronger framework for performance management and quality assurance.

***Consultation: including any conflict of interest declared by relevant Cabinet Member consulted.***

There has been consultation with Children's Services Management Team.

***Recommendation(s):***

Extend the contracts of the Family Decision Making team to 30/6/2023, with a review in February 2023 of whether to extend for a longer period, and to move the service to be part of the Family Connect service with an associated refocusing of the level of need at which the team work and strengthened performance and quality assurance arrangements.

***Implications:***

*What are the financial implications?*

This report is seeking to extend the existing arrangements of the Family Decision Making Team to 30 June 2023.

The posts are all included in the existing establishment and funding for the posts is undertaken by a drawdown of reserve from the Reform Investment Fund. The costs of these posts have been included in the forward plan profiling of the use of this reserve over the next 3 years.

Sufficient balance is available, and no additional cost will be incurred by the council.

At the end of the fixed term arrangements redeployment will be considered as an initial option before any call on possible redundancy costs. It is anticipated that any such costs will also be met from the reform investment fund reserve.

The table below summarises the posts in scope with a total annualised cost of approx. £0.239m including on costs, all to be met from the reform investment fund.

Profiling of spend is as follows:

2022-23 £0.179m

2023-24 £0.060m

Post	Grade	Amount (incl. on costs)
Family Group Conference Coordination Manager	Grade8	52,730
Family Group Conference Coordinator	Grade7	39,740
Family Group Conference Coordinator	Grade7	45,740
Family Group Conference Coordinator	Grade7	44,450
Family Group Conference Coordinator	Grade7	44,450
Business Support Officer	Grade2	11,990
<b>Total</b>		<b>239,100</b>

Vicki Hayes – Senior Accountant/Sadrul Alam  
Finance Manager

Comments from HR are noted, no further comments.  
R Aggarwal Principal Employment Solicitor.

What are the **legal** implications?

What are the **procurement** implications?

n/a

What are the **Human Resources** implications?

The key issue with this proposal to extend is that it takes 4 of the individuals over 4 years' service in their fixed terms. This gives the individuals a right to be considered permanent unless it can be objectively justified that they remain fixed term. Work is currently underway to review the Fixed term workers guidance and process which will lead to a review of all Fixed term employees across the council where they are approaching 4 years service or are already over.

The usual advice around fixed workers and redundancy entitlements applies.

**Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment** attached or not required because (please give reason)

Kate Jolley  
HR Strategic Lead.

The proposals will not have an adverse impact on any section of the population, and will help support families in better meeting the needs of vulnerable children

What are the **property** implications

n/a

**Risks:**

Failure to extend the contracts of the team risks losing skilled staff and the benefits of their work with families

**Is Co-operative agenda**

The role of the team is to work with families and their wider network of family and friends to put together a family plan through which they will meet the needs of children in the family.

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? Yes



Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? No

**Reason(s) for exemption from publication:**

**List of Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:**

There are no background papers to this report

<b>Report Author Sign-off:</b>	
Bruce Penhale	
<b>Date: 1/8/22</b>	

In consultation with Managing Director of Children & Young People, Gerard Jones			
Signed		Date: 2/8/22	
In consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive, Sayyed Osman			
Signed		Date: 25.08.22	

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 A briefing was presented to Children's DMT on Family Group Conferencing and the work of the Family Decision Making (FDM) Team in Oldham. This reviewed the evidence base for the intervention more generally and the available information about the work of the team to date. Following that discussion, this delegated decision report has been prepared to determine the future of the team and the direction of its work.
- 1.2 The Oldham FDM Team was established in June 2019 and original titled 'Family Group Conferencing Team'. This was changed by the Team with the permission of the former Director of Children's Services as the term 'Conference' was felt to cause confusion and alarm amongst families who believed it was linked to the child protection procedures.
- 1.3 The Team comprises 6 staff members: 1 full-time permanent Team Manager, 4 full-time Family Group Conference Coordinators on fixed term contracts and a part-time Business Support Officer on a fixed term contract. The Team is funded via the Reform Investment Fund. DMT has recently approved the extension of these contracts until December 2022.
- 1.4 The Team has been managed by a number of officers from across the Service including the Early Help Service Manager, Head of Children's Assessment Teams (CAT) and the Assistant Director Improvement. Line management currently sits with the Head of CAT. The Team Manager and Coordinators have all been trained in the Family Group Conferencing Model by the Family Rights Group.

### **2. Proposed future operating model**

- 2.1 It is proposed that the posts of all team members be extended to 30 June 2023, with a review in February 2023 in order to allow a fuller assessment of the impact of the Team's work in supporting children and families..
- 2.2 It is also proposed that the management of the team be moved into early help in order to support a shift towards earlier intervention as well as to reinforce to families that the Family Decision Making team are not part of Children's Social Care – helping to overcome potential barriers to involvement of families in the process.
- 2.3 The family group conferencing model was developed for situations in which a decision and plan is needed in order to meet the needs of a vulnerable child. The process is a family led meeting involving members of the family's wider family and social network. Wherever possible children are involved in their own family group conference. The approach is applicable in a wide range of circumstances, for example where there are safeguarding needs such as a result of domestic abuse, supporting children with additional needs, addressing issues around engagement with education, involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour or because a young person needs support at a point of transition – for example a young person leaving care.
- 2.4 The approach is applicable at different levels of need, but the earlier support is put in place the more likely it is to result in positive outcomes. Experience over the last two years is that engagement with families has often been unsuccessful where families are already

in crisis at the point of intervention. The proposal is therefore to shift the focus to support at an earlier stage in order to prevent needs escalating.

### **Referral criteria**

- 2.5 Referrals will be restricted to families which are open to a Council targeted early worker or where children are open to social care at Child in Need (CIN). Referrals will be made by the targeted early help worker or social worker where they believe that putting a place a support plan for the family involving their wider network of family and friends could address the child(ren)'s needs without needing continuing children's services involvement.
- 2.6 Linked to use of Supporting Families funding for supporting families with complex, inter-related problems, referrals will be restricted to families in which there are concerns for a child's welfare in relation to at least three of the ten Supporting Families outcome areas:
- Getting a good education
  - Good early years development
  - Improved mental and physical health
  - Promoting recovery and reducing harm from substance use
  - Improved family relationships
  - Children safe from abuse and exploitation
  - Crime prevention and tackling crime
  - Safe from domestic abuse
  - Secure housing
  - Financial stability
- 2.7 In order for the intervention to have a chance of success, two further conditions also must be met prior to support from the team being agreed:
- Informed consent from family members to participate in the process;
  - Existence of a wider family and social network which has the potential to support the family in keeping the child at home or within the wider family network.
- This is critical in order to significantly increase the percentage of families referred which result in a family plan being agreed and successfully implemented.
- 2.8 Where the service is oversubscribed, priority should be given to cases taking into account the potential benefits that can be achieved by the intervention, and the likelihood that the intervention to be successful in achieving these.

### **Projected service volumes**

- 2.9 It is important that the service can respond quickly in addressing the presenting need, so the service standard would be to undertake the family meeting within 4 weeks of referral. Allowing time to follow through from the family meeting and put the agreed plan in place the full process should take a maximum of six weeks. A follow up meeting could subsequently be organised after 3-6 months if there were issues with the child's plan which required a further family decision making meeting to address them.
- 2.10 In order to achieve the necessary timeliness and quality of support, caseloads should not exceed 8 families per person (which might typically relate to 15-20 children). Based on these caseloads and timescales, the team would be able to work with around 230 families per year (potentially with around 450-550 children).

- 2.11 Targeting support below the point of crisis, and better identifying at the point of referral families with a willingness to participate in the intervention, should increase the percentage which result in a family decision making meeting taking place and a plan being produced. Based on a minimum target of 70% of accepted referrals, this would deliver around 160 family plans per year. Based on a service cost of £243,882 this would make the unit cost of a plan £1,524.

### **Service impact, outcomes and quality assurance**

- 2.12 There is a need to bring the work of the Team within the Children's Services reporting arrangements. This will need a workflow to be developed on Mosaic. In the short-term some reporting can be achieved by the Co-ordinators recording themselves on Mosaic as a professional working with the family at the point a referral is accepted, and establishing a new case note type of Family Decision Making meeting which would then be reportable. A Mosaic dashboard could be produced to report on the work.
- 2.13 The work of the Team will be included within the monthly Family Connect Head of Service report to the Children's Assurance Board. The impact of the work will need to be included within the outcomes reporting system used for other targeted early help work, and which also feeds into the reporting arrangements for the Supporting Families programme against the 10 outcome areas listed above.
- 2.14 Further work is planned on measuring the impact of targeted early help work, and the work of the Family Decision Making Team will be incorporated within this. Two key indicators of the outcomes of interventions would be:
- De-escalation of need following completion of the plan (e.g. case closure or stepped down from CIN to Early Help);
  - Rates of re-referral back into Children's Services in the 12 months following completion of the plan.
- 2.15 The work of the team will also be incorporated within the wider Children's Services Quality Assurance Framework, including the manager completing a monthly case audit and undertaking other activity to assess the quality of the team's work. The team will continue to gather feedback from both families and professionals at the end of the intervention (both for cases that result in a plan and those that do not) providing qualitative feedback about the impact of the work.

### **Future development**

- 2.16 If the impact of the Family Decision Making model can be demonstrated, then there is potential for future development, for example by training more staff in both Children's Social Care and Early Help. The proposed use of fixed term contracts to 30 June 2023 allows time to review the impact of the new model, with the potential for future extension in line with the timescales for which Reform Investment Funding is currently available (to 31/3/25). Extension of the national Supporting Families programme would potentially enable the work to be extended further, or options could be explored for mainstreaming the posts.