



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Family Group Conference Policy

St Helens Borough Council

June 2024 – June 2025

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1. Introduction

A Family Group Conference (FGC) is a family led decision-making and planning process, arranged and facilitated by an independent, trained Facilitator. The FGC model is a voluntary process and cannot be completed without a family/carer's consent (those with PR). Once consent is gained and a request is made, the Facilitator will proceed, with the option of the family withdrawing their consent at any point of the process. Any child open to a social worker can have a Family Group Conference supported as a Child in Need through to Children We Look After.

A Family Group Conference is based on the principles of partnership and is a means of engaging and empowering families. They are designed to promote the family and extended family's ownership of the plans needed and support them in problem solving to gain the best outcomes for the best interests of the children, within a professionally supportive framework.

Family Group Conferencing aims to make use of the family strengths and resources they have and those which the family may need, to create their unique plan and seeks to respect each family's own culture and values.

2. Service Principles

The Family Group Conference Team's overall aim is to maintain family relations and reduce the risk to children within their family homes, preventing breakdown of families, placements and reducing the numbers of Children We Look After. The FGC process is a solution focused, family strengths-based model.

The service seeks to:

- Empower families to devise their own plan to address the concerns Children's Social Care has
- Empower children and young people to have their voice heard (this can be via attendance at the meeting, leading the meeting, or using an advocate to share their views)
- Preventing children and young people entering the care system

- Empower and fully enable family and their wider support network in planning and implementing the plans to achieve positive outcomes
- Establish positive working relationships between the family, St Helens Council and other partner agencies for the best outcome of the child/young person
- Provide clear information and support to parents and their wider support network so they understand their rights, options and expectations within the Family Group Conference model
- Ensure that vulnerable family members are supported in attending and having their voices heard

3. Overall Aim

The overall aim of a Family Group Conference is to maintain as many children as possible in their family units, where it is safe to do so, with the overall aim of preventing admissions into care. We need to ensure that children have safe, stable and loving homes, which is their secure base to support their growth and maximise their life chances. To do this we need to ensure we can respond quickly and effectively to the needs of the children and families, whilst also supporting at crisis point to prevent further breakdown.

The team aims to:

- Provide Family Group Conferencing at the earliest opportunity
- Establish a clear SMART family plan, made by the family and agreed between them and the Local Authority
- Provide family the opportunity to request support and resources to support their family plan
- Prevent family and placement breakdown
- Reduce the number of professionals and timescale of intervention for children, young people, and families
- Reduce children and young people being open to statutory services
- Reduce numbers of children and young people We Look After
- Make sustained change for children and families

4. Family Group Conference structure and process

The Family Group Conference Team is part of the FaST (Families Staying Together) Service within Children's Social Care and provides families with an independent Family Group Conference. A Family Group Conference is facilitated by a professional who is not involved in any wider decision making as part of Local Authority involvement. The team itself consists of a Family Group Conference Manager, two full time Facilitators, and two part time Facilitators.

5. The request

Initial verbal consent is gained from the family by the allocated social worker for a request to be made. There is an agreement between family and the Local Authority that a plan is needed to be made for a child or young person, with the family being informed they will be integral to the decision-making process. A 'Family Group Conference Service Request' via ICS is made following agreement from family to proceed.

The request is reviewed by the Family Group Conference Manager and is allocated to a trained Family Group Conference Facilitator within 5 working days. The request will determine what level of current harm there is, whether a Family Network Meeting has taken place to inform the Family Group Conference process, what family is asked to create a plan around (addressing the concerns the Local Authority has), as well as whether the request is exploring viability/contingency planning. The request captures what support is already in place for a family as well as strengths and a risk assessment completed by the referrer, and recent voice of the child/young person. To support with the demand on the Local Authority's professionally-supervised Family Time, a request can also support with identifying a suitable network member to take ownership of this supervision in a planned and safe manner.

6. Preparing for the meeting

The Family Group Conference Facilitator will contact the social worker requesting the service on receipt of allocation to discuss what their aim is for the Family Group Conference, completing a Family Information Form to document the need for the request (see Appendix 2).

The Facilitator will then contact initial caregivers of the child/young person and arrange a home visit. Within the initial visit they will explain fully the process of the FGC supported by the Family Information Form, complete a genogram, and explore their wider family/friends support network who they want to attend the FGC. By the end of this visit, a provisional date for the FGC is agreed. Within the home visit, the below is explained to family:

- What are we worried about?: This is what family is asked to create a plan around, to address the concerns the Local Authority has. No new information is shared regarding the worries in the Family Group Conference, which must be shared ahead of the Family Group Conference taking place.
- The 'bottom line': The Facilitator will have asked the social worker what the current level of threshold is, and what is a non-negotiable. The Facilitator will ask what is likely to happen if a family plan is not made and effective, as well as what the impact on the child/young person would be if this is the case.
- Support and resources: this explores what support and resources are in place for the family, and an opportunity for other professionals (information givers) to discuss their role with family and any outstanding work that needs to be completed, and wish for the family to complete. Professionals' work with family informs wider family of those involved, when they may have not been aware of such involvement, to support with their discussions around the family plan. Family will be asked whether there is any further support they require to make a family plan work best, providing this can be agreed by the Local Authority.
- Questions: an opportunity for the family to ask questions of any professionals.
- What is working well? Family is asked to share what they feel is working well, and it will be shared what Children's Social Care believes is working well.

- The Facilitator will explore all professionals besides the allocated social worker working with the child/family, invite them at family's request and explain their role at the meeting, which will be as an information giver, to answer questions from the family and clarify any work or support they maybe undertaking.
- The Facilitator will meet with the child/young person, usually within their education setting, to complete the voice of the child and a child's genogram, to ensure they can have a view on who they would like to invite to their FGC. During this visit the child/young person will be asked whether they are attending, they would like support or an advocate at their meeting, so this can be arranged. For children who are too young to understand the request, they will be involved in their Family Group Conference in a way which is appropriate and considered. Voice of the Child will only be uploaded post-FGC to protect the purpose of such work being solely for the request itself. In the event of safeguarding concerns being disclosed within this work, the Facilitator will notify the social worker and upload this work immediately.
- The Facilitator, following the meeting with the caregivers and child, will contact and meet all individual members of the family and wider family support network to prepare for their meeting. Although it is the family's decision who they invite, it will be the Facilitator's role to assess if it is appropriate for them to attend, based on risk. This decision will be made in conjunction with the family, in order for a successful Family Group Conference taking place. If there is a legal reason preventing parties taking part in the same Family Group Conference, then there will be a 'shuttle' offered in this instance where two Family Group Conferences typically run alongside each other.

7. The meeting

The Initial Family Group Conference will last approximately two hours, with involved professionals attending in person.

Chaired by the Facilitator, (and young person or other family member, if appropriate) introductions are made and the Facilitator clarifies the FGC process and rules for success.

1. Voice of the child/young person. Family is reminded that their child/young person has a right to be heard and it is very important that they are involved in their Family Group Conference, in what ever way is appropriate, to ensure they play a role in any decisions being made about them. The child/young person can share their views, or the Facilitator will read out their views as captured in the direct work session, whichever the child decides).

8. Private family time

During this part of the Family Group Conference process, family is reminded of what requires planning for and all professionals are asked to leave the room, leaving the family to discuss and create their own plan. Professionals are asked to leave at this juncture to not directly influence the contents of the family's plan and their discussions.

9. Agreeing the family plan

The Facilitator, social worker and any other involved professionals will re-join the family so they can present their family plan. Any amendments/further clarification are made within the FGC and the Facilitator adds these details to the family plan with their agreement to support with its interpretation. The plan then needs to be agreed by the referrer (social worker). If for any reason there are parts of the plan that are not agreed due to safeguarding concerns, or the family has not addressed the concerns they have been asked to, The Facilitator will support them in going returning to family time to amend their family plan. In some circumstances, the Facilitator may need to stop the Family Group Conference and will discuss with the social worker and family how to proceed, or Management Oversight may need to be sought, which should be within the meeting or with a timescale to be shared with family.

Once a FGC has taken place, the Facilitator will type up the family plan onto the family plan template (see Appendix 8) will be shared with family members, within five working days. The agreed plan will contain the following:

- Covering letter thanking family for attending and an agreed review date, usually within 6 weeks of the initial FGC taking place, unless agreed otherwise
- Details of time, date and venue of the initial FGC
- Details of the family members, support network and professionals who attended

- Child/young person's voice
- Questions and answers
- The family's agreed plan and supporting notes
- Actions from professionals and timescales
- Updates from a review, if held

10. Monitoring and reviewing the family plan

The social worker and family members remain responsible for the ongoing monitoring of the family plan. A successful plan depends upon the family and professionals working together and keeping all involved individuals informed of the progress of their plan throughout the FGC process.

A review FGC will be offered to the family and a date set for usually six weeks following the initial FGC. The aim of reviewing the family plan is to review whether the family plan is progressing and if not, what changes do they need to be made to support the family plan working. Family can request to have a review date sooner or later than six weeks, within reason as enough time should elapse for the plan to be in place, and they can also choose not to review their family plan.

11. Closure to the Family Group Conference Team

Once a family have been through the FGC process, they have successfully completed a family plan and reviewed it and/or closed to services, their involvement will be closed to the FGC team. If the family have been through the FGC process before and are still open to Children's Social Care, the family or social worker can request a new FGC via a new request, if required, which would start a new FGC episode. If a FGC has been held within the past 6 months, a re-request for a review only can be made.

12. Non-engagement

Some family's involvement while their child/young person is open to Children's Social Care is very limited, or non-existent, for a variety of reasons. The Family Group Conference Team works hard to support non-engagers in engaging in the family-led process, to ensure their views are heard and that they have the opportunity to play an

active role in their child/young person's journey. The Family Group Conference Team has a process to follow to ensure non-engagement is approached consistently, proactively and timely, to maximise the chances of family taking part and consenting to this voluntary process within 4 weeks from allocation:

Week one: allocation. Telephone calls x3 across the week with follow up voicemails/text messages recorded on ICS

Week two: x2 telephone calls with follow up voicemails/text messages. The Facilitator will double check contact details are correct

Week three: the Facilitator will send family a letter asking them to respond to them (see appendix 2). The letter will be SMART i.e. a date to get back to the Facilitator by

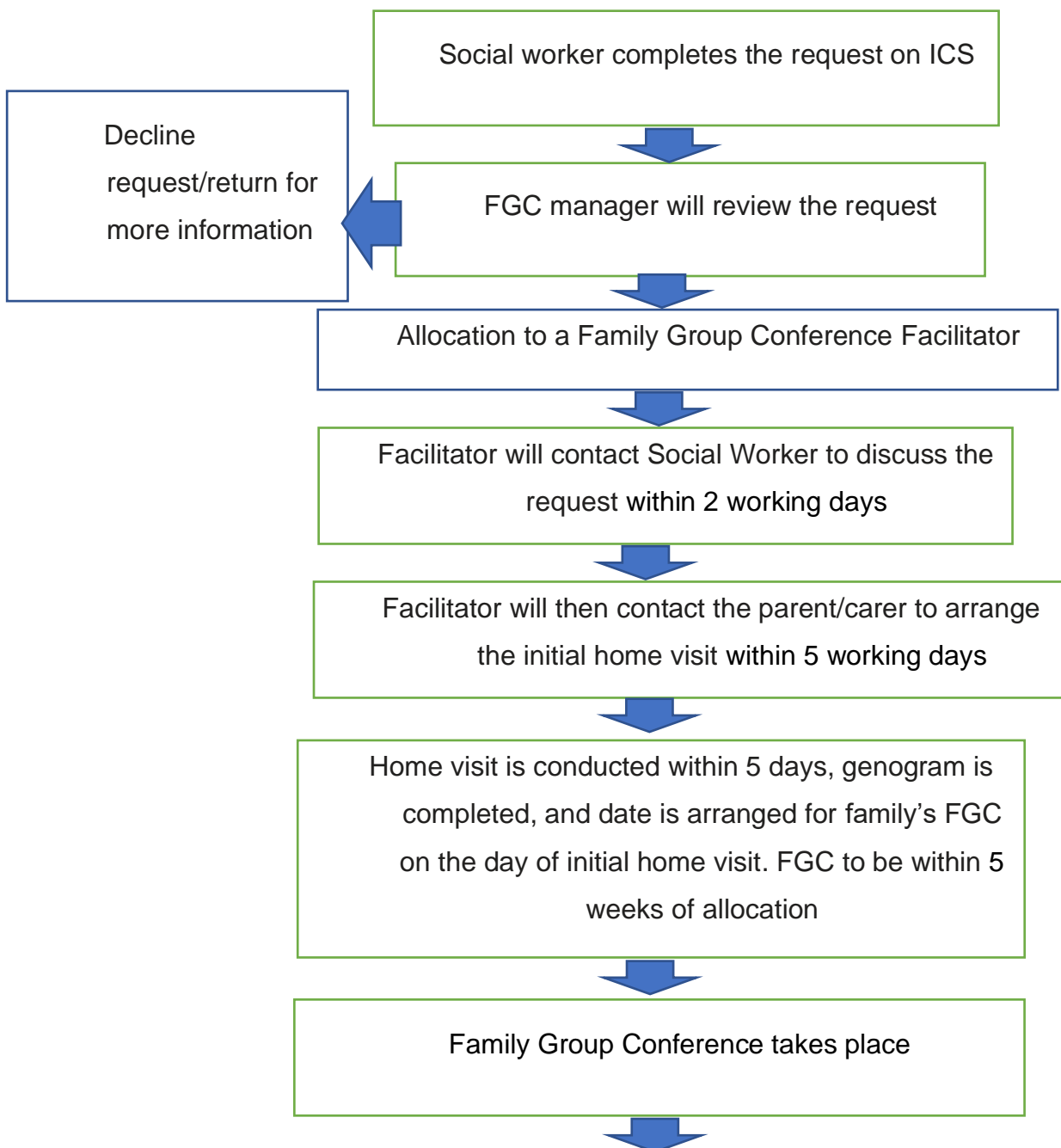
Week four: time for family to respond to the Facilitator's letter. If they do not respond by the date given, the request will be sent for closure and social worker notified. If the family is an Edge of Care family, Edge of Care reviews will be utilised to feed back lack of progress to determine whether there are further actions required or closure is agreed

The Family Group Conference Team will clearly track efforts in engaging families as quickly as possible, making best efforts within this time to do it, to demonstrate everything has been done to support with the request in a timely manner. This avoids any drift and delay in cases and ensures efforts are focussed on the families who consent to a Family Group Conference and wish to participate in the process.

Appendices

Appendix 1: FGC flow chart

Family Group Conference



Review date set within 4 or 6 weeks on agreement
with family and Social Worker

Appendix 2: Family Information Form



Family Information
Form June 24.docx

Appendix 3: Family Information Form: guidance for staff



Family Information
form guidance.docx

Appendix 3: Genogram key



Genogram key.pdf

Appendix 3: consent form



Consent form June
2024.docx

Appendix 4: Non-engagement letter



non engagement
letter template.docx

Appendix 5: Family Rights Group practice standards

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE SEVEN QUALITY STANDARDS



1. FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE COORDINATOR IS INDEPENDENT.



2. FAMILY'S DECISION TO PARTICIPATE IS VOLUNTARY.



3. FGC IS FAMILY-LED & INCLUDES "PRIVATE FAMILY TIME" FOR THE FAMILY TO MAKE A PLAN.



4. REFERRED CHILD OR ADULT IS THE CENTRAL FOCUS OF THE FGC & SUPPORTED TO TAKE PART.



5. FGC SERVICE SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE FAMILY HAS ALL NECESSARY RESOURCES TO MAKE THEIR PLAN.



6. FGC SHOULD RESPECT THE FAMILY'S PRIVACY AND RIGHT TO CONFIDENTIALITY.



7. THE FGC SERVICE SHOULD WORK TO THE PRINCIPLES OF EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVITY, PROMOTING DIVERSITY INCLUDING RESPECTING AND BEING SENSITIVE TO THE FAMILY'S CULTURE AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES.



Standard 1: The FGC coordinator is independent.

By independent we mean that family group conference (FGC) coordinators may work for children's services, but they should not be your social worker or anyone involved in making decisions for your family either now or in the past.



Standard 3: The family group conference (FGC) should be family-led and include 'private family time' for the family to make a plan in response to concerns.

The FGC will be guided by you and your family. The FGC can include relatives, friends or other people who support the family. The coordinator can help you throughout the FGC process. The family should have a say in when and where the meeting happens. As well as discussing issues raised by children's services, your meeting should include discussion about matters that are important to you. During the meeting itself, you will have time alone with your family and friends to make your plan.



Standard 5: The FGC service should ensure that the family has all necessary resources, including adequate preparation, relevant information, and a safe and appropriate environment, to make their plan.

Before your meeting, you should have all the information you need to be able to make your family plan. The coordinator will have visited or spoken to everyone involved with the FGC. Everyone will have a chance to ask questions and understand the information. The meeting should be held in a place where your family feel comfortable and safe. Anything you need to help you access or attend the meeting and feel comfortable while you are there will be provided.



Standard 2: The family's decision to participate in the FGC is voluntary.

The person in your family with parental responsibility (sometimes called PR) can choose whether you want to have an FGC and who should be involved. Anyone invited to take part can choose whether they want to be involved or attend the FGC.



Standard 4: The referred child or adult should be the focus of the family group conference (FGC) and they should be offered support, including an advocate.

Each child or adult will be helped to get the most out of their FGC and to make sure their views are included. An advocate is a person who can help them share their views if needed. The coordinator can tell you more about an advocate if you think this would help.



Standard 6: The FGC should respect the family's privacy and right to confidentiality.

Your coordinator will only share your information with your consent. However, if your coordinator believes you are suffering significant harm or finds out something that puts you or someone else at risk, they have a responsibility to pass that information on to a relevant person (e.g. social worker). The FGC service should be very clear about what information they collect and store and how your information will be used. They should also share their confidentiality policy with you. You should have a private space to have your FGC. The only written record should be your family plan.

Standard 7: The FGC service should work to the principles of equality and inclusivity, promoting diversity including respecting and being sensitive to the family's culture and individual identities.

The FGC service should have a clear equality, diversity and inclusion policy that you can see. Your coordinator should take time to understand you and your family. The FGC process should meet your family's needs, should be accessible and be in your preferred language.

Appendix 6: headed paper



headed paper.docx

Appendix 7: calling cards template



Calling cards
template.doc

Appendix 8: Family plan template



FGC plan.docx