

## Early Help Family Group Conferencing

Date: 17<sup>th</sup> September 2024

Report of: Service Delivery Manager, Early Help

Report to: Director of Children and Families

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

### Brief summary

It is our ambition to grow our Family Group Conferencing Service so more families can benefit from Family Led Decision making strategies, including FGC at an earlier stage. This approach is aligned with our commitment to Early Help, our Early Help Strategy and the Leeds Practice Model which incorporates family led decision making as a key element of practice in Leeds. This report is being submitted to seek approval to create a small, community-based Family Group Conferencing team.

### Recommendations

- a) That the Director of Children and Families endorses the proposal to create an Early Help Family Group Conferencing Team.
- b) That the Director of Children and Families grants approval for staffing costs to be attributed to the Supported Families Programme funding until March 2026.

### What is this report about?

- 1 The Early Help Review was established with the over-arching aim of improving early help services within a context of achieving efficiencies by simplifying structures and processes as the city, its children and families, and the directorate recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 2 The review built on the expertise the service has already developed and the solid infrastructure established through consistent and innovative investment in the early help offer.
- 3 The review has supported the objectives articulated in the Leeds Early Help Strategy, including keeping families at the centre of our decision making, taking an evidence-based approach to developing and delivering services and continued investment in a skilled, flexible, and highly performing workforce.
- 4 The review was designed to address some of the current and more systemic challenges and operational drivers present in Leeds and nationally. These include:
  - High numbers of adolescents and babies entering care.

- The importance of responding effectively to issues around contextual safeguarding such as exploitation and youth violence.
- The need to align with the national Family Hub framework.
- Addressing barriers families experience in accessing timely and appropriate services.
- Supporting families experiencing poverty and inequality; and
- Leads' commitment to becoming a Trauma Informed city.

5 The review recommendations and subsequent new Early Help structure were approved in April 2024. We are now in the implementation phase, with the intension that the new Family Hub delivery model will commence in September 2024.

6 As part of the recommendations referenced within the Early Help Review, we are proposing that we establish an Early Help Family Group Conferencing Service.

### **What impact will this proposal have?**

7 The proposal will enable us to take a more proactive and preventative approach to supporting families, early in the life of the problem. Establishing an Early Help Family Group Conferencing team will support us in delivering an FGC offer to families within an Early Help context, which will enable us to specifically support families to address;

- Parental Conflict
- Transfer to Early Help
- School Attendance
- Support for children with SEND
- Vulnerable Babies and work with Children's Centres
- Family Conflict
- Parental Mental/ Physical Health, Domestic Abuse and Substance Use
- Community Conferencing

This will support early help intervention and developments around family-led decision making, whilst supporting families to avoid unnecessary referrals to statutory social work teams. These proposals are aligned with the Children and Young People's Plan 2023- 2028 and our obsessions.

### **How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?**

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

#### Health and Wellbeing

8 When children and their families are provided with the right support, at the right time, opportunities are created for change and improved outcomes. The proposed implementation of an Early Help Family Group Conferencing team will create opportunities for more effective early intervention and prevention. This will lead to families leading happier and healthier lives and improved, sustainable outcomes.

#### Inclusive Growth

9 Young people who benefit from an earlier offer of Family Group Conferencing to address challenges in their lives and are more likely to regularly attend school, attain and achieve

throughout their learning journey, leading to better employment opportunities, and the benefits to all being an economically active member of society.

We will seek appointments that are culturally diverse and representative of marginalised communities. We will be ambitious in ensuring that the team are representative of the Communities they are seeking to engage, with a focus on community cohesion and meeting specific need by taking a community-based approach.

### Zero Carbon

- 10 The delivery of Family Group Conferences, in the heart of communities where Early Help services are most in demand, will improve local accessibility reducing the need for travel across the city.

### **What consultation and engagement has taken place?**

Wards affected: City wide

Have ward members been consulted?       Yes                       No

- 11 Consultation has taken place as part of the wider Early Help Review, cross Directorate. It is acknowledged that this additional resource for families will enhance and compliment the Family Hub offer.
- 12 The existing Family Group Conferencing Management group have been involved in the proposals and they are in full support of expanding the service to Early Help.
- 13 Finance and Hr colleagues have been made aware of this proposal and are supportive.
- 14 Trade Union colleagues have been consulted and all are in agreement with the proposals.

### **What are the resource implications?**

- 15 The team will consist of 1FTE PO6 Family Group Conferencing Team Manager and 4FTE PO2 Family Group Conferencing Coordinators.
- 16 Funding up to March 25 is currently confirmed and every expectation is that funding will be secured until March 2026 but this risk will be mitigated by recruiting on a fixed term basis, therefore in the first instance, these posts will all be recruited to on a fixed term basis until end of March 2026. However, as soon as we receive clarity regarding future arrangements for the Earned Autonomy funding through the Supporting Families Programme, consideration will be given and approval sought, to extend delivery beyond this date.
- 17 Staffing costs for the team are as follows;
- 1FTE PO6, SCP (£63,766 - £67,844)
- 4FTE PO2, SCP (£48,826 - £52,695) = £195,304 – £210,780
- Total – £278, 624**
- 18 All figures above are based on an annual basis and include on costs (Basic, NI and Super) and assume a 3.5% pay award for 24/25 (not agreed at present).
- 19 Finance colleagues have confirmed there is sufficient unallocated Supporting Families budget within the current year to fund these additional posts.

### **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- 20 Community conferencing will be a new approach to Family led decision making in Leeds. It will be the responsibility of the Team Manager to drive this agenda forward, taking on board the learning from other Local Authorities who have attempted to implement community conferencing within their respective areas.
- 21 To manage the risks around this approach, a steering group will be established and their work will feed into the Family Help Partnership Board to ensure there are sufficient governance arrangements in place.
- 22 The team will be funded through short term funding, until March 2026. This may present challenges in terms of recruiting the right candidates and ensuring retention of those appointed. Every effort will be made to seek clarity around future funding, through our close links with DfE and our regional lead for the Supporting Families Programme.
- 23 We need to ensure that we are recruiting a team who are representative of the diverse communities within the City. To this end, we will follow best practice in terms of EDI recruitment and seek to appoint people from a varied range of backgrounds and communities.

### **What are the legal implications?**

- 24 There are no known legal implications.

## **Options, timescales and measuring success**

### **What other options were considered?**

- 25 We have considered widening the current offer of Family Group Conferencing within our existing resources, but there is not sufficient capacity to deliver this early help offer alongside the priority work with children who are on the edge of care and involved in statutory processes, including care proceedings.
- 26 We have considered not setting up an Early Help Family Group Conferencing team, but this limits our offer of Family Group Conferencing within an Early Help context. We are ambitious in our desire to ensure that a Family Group Conference is available to all families in Leeds, whether through Early Help, or Statutory Social Work. Family Group Conferencing within an Early Help Context will require a slightly different model of delivery and cannot be accommodated within our current offer.

### **How will success be measured?**

- 27 As part of the Early Help Review, we will be appointing additional Outcomes Coordinators who will lead on measuring success across all Early Help Services. This will enable us to report on what is working well, and where we need to make improvements or changes to the services we are delivering. Early Help Family Group Conferencing and our wider Family Group Conferencing service will have the benefit of a dedicated Outcomes Coordinator who will be able to support with the robust measuring of success.

### **What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?**

- 28 The Service Delivery Manager for Families First will be responsible for the implementation of the Early Help Family Group Conferencing team.
- 29 Implementation will begin with a competitive recruitment process in October 2024, with a view to operational delivery commencing as soon as applicants take up posts.

## **Appendices**

- EDCI Screening Form
- Structure

### **Background papers**

- None