

Introduction

The selection of Dorset Council as a Families First for Children Pathfinder (FFCP) provides a unique opportunity to deliver pioneering reforms to support Children, Young People and Families, aligning to our Dorset Children, Young People and Families Plan.

We know that our Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners are well placed to support the programme with its ambitions not least in ensuring that families get local, preventative, community led support in the right place and at right time.

The purpose of the project is to provide independent facilitation of Family Network Meeting within the community when requested via a Lead Practitioner, and to resource Family Network Support Packages where applicable.

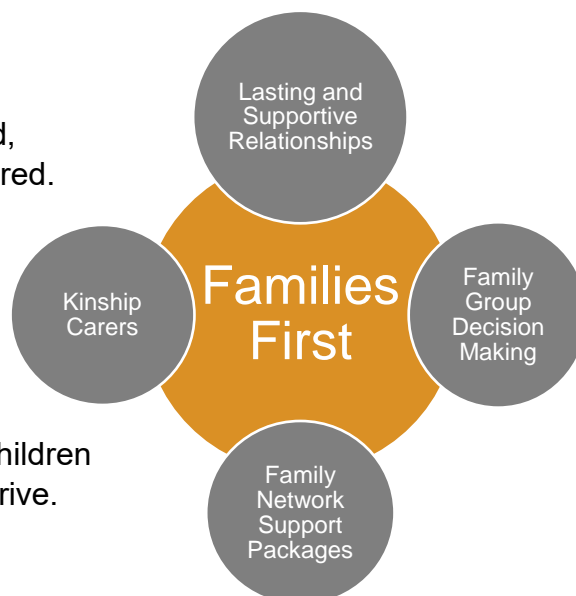
Grant applications are open to VCS organisations to develop, deliver, and evaluate the project from September 2024 - March 2026 across the Dorset Council area. We wish to take a collaborative and emergent approach to delivery during the grant period, as best practice is developed and shared.

Background and local operating context

*“Greater use of family networks, involving the wider family in decision-making at an earlier stage throughout the system, and providing practical and financial support via family network support packages to help them keep children safe and well at home”
Department for Education*

Our local vision:

- Families we work with feel informed, engaged, involved, listened to, respected, and empowered.
- More children will be enabled to stay at home through a ‘families first’ approach to our work with the wider Family Network.
- More children who cannot remain safely with their birth parents will instead grow up within the wider Family Network, as opposed to care arrangements outside of the family. Children in those arrangements will be supported to thrive.



What is a Family Network?

Family Networks will be identified by families themselves and could include extended family members such as aunts, uncles and grandparents, friends or non-family members such as faith group representatives, community volunteers etc.

We are thoughtful that not everyone will have a family network around them. Family Hubs and our work with our communities will provide lots of opportunities for us to broker connections for our children and families.

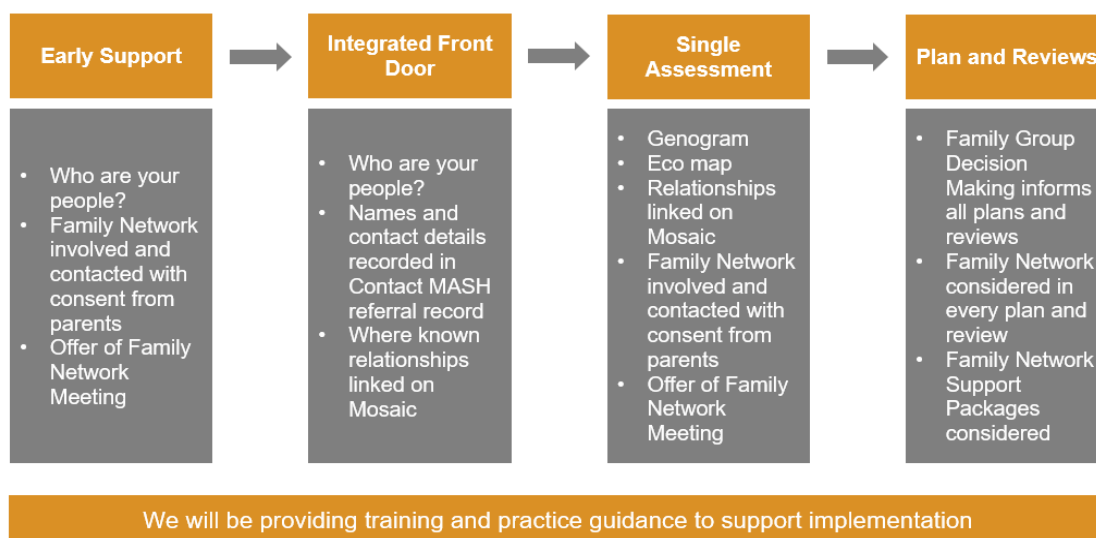
A Systemwide Approach



We will engage family networks as early as possible in our work with families and at each point a decision is made about a child, empowering family networks to support decision making where appropriate – this will be known as ‘Family Group Decision Making’.

Our expectation is that by involving the family network early on this will mean families are wrapping around and enabled to support much earlier.

The image below shows tools and approaches to aid our work with Family networks:

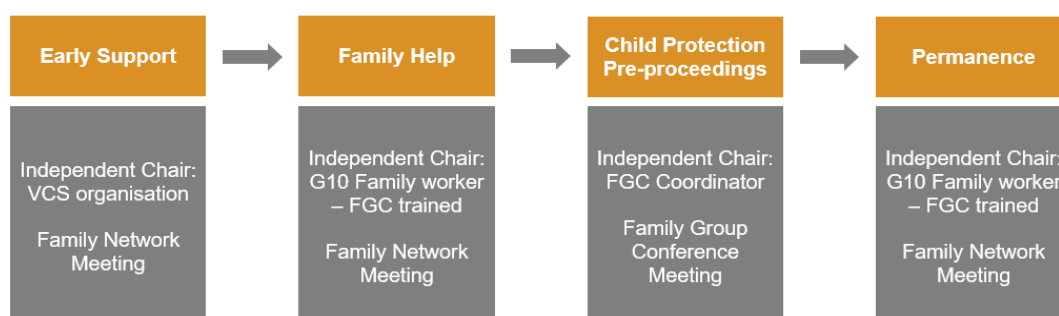


Family Group Decision Making

FGDM is facilitated by an independent coordinator. This means the coordinator cannot have any decision-making responsibility, or history of this for the family.

The coordinator may be employed by the LA but be independent from the specific case or employed by a commissioned service. Independence ensures that the facilitator does not influence or pressure the family network in any way.

The diagram below shows how FGDM works across our system and who could provide independent coordination at different points.



Family Network Meeting Grant – background and local operating context

Guidance for independent facilitators

Family Network Meetings in the community

Family Network meetings will be family led and are all about finding out what the network can do and what the family need - they should be the starting point of any of our early help and child in need plans.

Before a Family Network meeting the Lead Practitioner will prepare the family so that they can be thinking about what will help them and their family the most. This will include if there are any professionals identified by the family who they think can help them.

Family Network Meetings can take place with or without practitioners in attendance, this will be determined by the family's preference. However, the independent facilitator must always be present.

Examples of how a Family Network Meeting may be held:

- A meeting set up the week before scheduled Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting facilitated by the independent facilitator with the identified family network members in attendance.
- A meeting held directly before scheduled TAF facilitated by the independent facilitator with the identified family network members in attendance. Practitioners would then join the family and the TAF would begin.

In the meetings, we will consider the strengths and opportunities within the Family Network to agree and develop a plan, this is Family Group Decision Making
The plan will detail how the Family Network can support the family, this could include things such as helping to cook meals, collecting children from school or offering a listening ear when things get tough. However, for some things additional resource may be required such as money for equipment or access to services; this is known as Family Network Support Package

The things that are agreed should be included in the Family Network Plan

The Family Network Support Package should be regularly reviewed as part of the Family Plan. Any changes to the package should be agreed through a Family Network Meeting.

Outcomes of Family Group Decision Making

FGDM should inform assessment and plan for family, this could include access to additional support through financial assistance or access to services.



Family Network Meeting Grant – background and local operating context

Family Network Support Packages (FNSP)

The Department for Education have defined Family Network Support Packages as packages that will:

- Provide practical support and funding to family networks when a child has a suitable family network but 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.
- Be directly allocated to family networks - not birth parents (as the latter can access this through section 17, Dorset Families Matter and other routes) unless it directly unlocks support from family network.
- Only be accessible through a Family Group Decision Making mechanism and as part of a Family plan.

A Family Network Support Package can only be accessed as part of a Family Plan, following Family Group Decision Making.

Family Network Support Packages can be anything the wider family needs to enable them to help parents look after their children.

Family Network Support Packages can range from practical things such as furniture, equipment and transport or services/interventions. Families and practitioners should think creatively about what will help.

Some examples include:

- Money to enable Aunt and Uncle to travel to pick up the children from school and give them dinner.
- A bigger car and car seats so Grandmother can take the children to school each morning.
- A new sofa bed to allow grandparents to stay at child's family home when mother is unwell.
- Mediation to improve communication and relationships between parents and grandparents.

Provision available:

Financial assistance

- Access to finances to enable the family network to purchase goods or services, or direct payments to individuals in response to identified needs in line with agreed family plan.

Family Network Support (Dorset Families Matter Packages)

- Can be defined as short term intensive services, activities or interventions which seek to engender and sustain change for the participant (member of family network)

Requested through an online application, via Dorset's Locality Partnership sites