

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date of meeting: 24 July 2024

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Life Long Links and Family Group Conference

Purpose: To update the panel on service development about Life Long Links and Family Group Conference

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note and discuss the update.

1. Background

1.1 Family Group Conferences support families to identify and establish a sustainable plan to meet the needs of children and young people within their family unit. Family Group Conferences provide a structured opportunity for a family-led meeting in which the family and friend network comes together to make, and review, a plan for a child/ren and young people. The process is supported by a coordinator who helps the family prepare for the Family Group Conference. Children and young people are usually involved in their own Family Group Conference, often with support from an advocate. A family plan is created, and one member of the network is appointed as the lead of the plan to monitor the process. In terms of identifying any short term or long term carers for children and young people this is highlighted in the meeting along with their capacity and any possible barriers. The duty of the local authority is to promote the plan and consider any alternative family and friend placements for children and young people if required.

1.2 The legal framework in England and Wales does not include a specific duty on local authorities to offer a Family Group Conference at a particular stage of work with a family. However, statutory guidance, which local authorities are required to act in accordance with, includes clear messages that promote their use including as a method of engaging the family network early. Since 2023, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has been an accredited Family Group Conference Service via Family Rights Group. Foundations, (2023), [published findings from their study](#), that definitively show that Family Group Conferences help families resolve concerns, keep children safely within their family network, and avert children from entering the care system.

1.3 Family Group Conference service is piloting Life Long Links a model from Family Rights Group, which supports the concept of relational stability, with the recognition that relationships can continue beyond placements and that foster carers and birth family members can work collaboratively. Lifelong Links aims to ensure that a child in care has a positive support network around them to help them during their time in care and into adulthood. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care stated that: *"All local authorities should have skilled family finding support equivalent to or exceeding, the work of Lifelong Links in place by 2024 at the very latest."*

2. Supporting information

2.1 The Family Group Conference service accepts referrals from Early Help Services and Social Workers with the aim of assisting the family to find support and solutions within their support network and wider family. The aim is for families to be supported by their network with

professional support and to be able to be stepped down or closed to services or alternative carers found.

2.2 Life Long Links aims to reconnect young people with family or professionals who have been a part of their life journey and are important to them. ESCC aspiration is that all East Sussex care leavers have at least two people who they feel love and care for them outside their professional network.

This will be achieved in the following ways:

- Social workers must speak to young people at fifteen and, with their consent, make a Life Long Links referral (Referral on the system).
- A question will be added to the Family and Friends section of the Pathway Plan asking if young people have received support from this service.
- Practice Managers and Operation Managers will be checking that referrals have been made. If it is not considered to be appropriate to make a referral this must be discussed in supervision and recorded. It is recognised that this might not be right for some young people, particularly unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), or that some will need to be referred later than 15, but the conversation should start at 15.
- Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and the Life Long Links managers will also receive notification each month of young people turning 15 in order to monitor that discussions are taking place and referrals are made.

2.3 ESCC works closely with the Family Rights Group who has accredited the Family Group Conference service and are providing supporting with the pilot of Life Long Links.

2.4 The Family Group Conference and Lifelong links presentations are attached as Appendix 1. Lifelong Links national data is attached as Appendix 2.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 Through refreshed pathways and Local Planning and Implementation Group, it is intended that ESCC will continue to work to address the key challenges existing across the system, enhancing the offer of Family Group Conference as an accredited service and with the pilot of Life Long Links.

3.2 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note and discuss the update.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None