

Briefing Paper: Families First – Key Messages for Partners

Newcastle Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP)

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Audience: Statutory and relevant safeguarding partners across education, local authority services, health, police, voluntary and community sector

Purpose of this Briefing

This briefing provides safeguarding partners with an update regarding the introduction of the national Families First reforms in Newcastle, a brief background to the reform context and an outline of development. It highlights what partners need to understand now, how to provide feedback responses and questions regarding these significant practice reforms.

What is Families First (and why it matters to partners)

Families First in Newcastle is the local delivery of the national [Families First Partnership \(FFP\) Programme](#), which sets out delivery expectations for safeguarding partners in England (local authority, police and health) and the wider “relevant agencies” who work with children and families.

The programme guide frames this as a whole-system reform intended to ensure families can access the right help at the right time, with a clear emphasis on earlier help, seamless support as needs change, and strong multi-agency working.

Why Families First is being implemented (national reform drivers)

The national programme rationale is that the children’s system must be rebalanced away from crisis intervention and toward earlier help and support, with reform implemented multi-agency and focused on improving children’s safety and wellbeing.

The ministerial foreword in the programme guide explicitly links the programme to a government “Plan for Change”, noting that increasing spend on statutory and acute services has historically come “at the expense of investment in preventative family support,” and that FFP is supported by over £500m in FY25/26 to support transformation and preventative support.

What safeguarding partners are expected to implement (as set out in the guide):

- Reforms to Family Help
- Reforms to multi-agency child protection, including expectations around multi-agency child protection team arrangements
- Greater use of Family Group Decision Making to help keep families together safely

The national policy context partners should be aware of

The programme guide references the [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) and identifies policy measures reflected in the reform, including:

- A measure to mandate an offer of Family Group Decision Making at the point where the local authority is seriously considering court action
- A measure creating a duty for safeguarding partners to establish multi-agency child protection teams (MACPTs) and to formalise how agencies facilitate their operation
- Measures to strengthen the role of education and childcare settings in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- Measures to improve information sharing, including an information sharing duty and provision enabling a consistent identifier ("Single Unique Identifier").

For partners, the practical takeaway is: **Families First is not just a local redesign; it is part of a nationally-directed, multi-agency reform programme that expects partners to co-design and co-deliver locally.**

What this means in Newcastle

Newcastle's Families First communications describe a local model aligned to the national direction, with system features partners will interact with, including:

- **One Front Door** (single, clear route to seek help and support quickly)
- **Family Help Teams** bringing together targeted early help and Child in Need service delivery
- **Child Protection Teams** and **Child Protection Leads** within a multi-agency child protection team approach
- **Family-Led Decision Making**, using Family Group Conferences more often and embedding family-led approaches in practice

Newcastle's stated vision in the comms is that the system should "put families first", work across services, build trust, and reduce families having to repeat their story—principles that mirror the "seamless" and relationship-based ambitions described in the national programme guide.

What partners can expect to see improve

From both the national guide and local comms, the partner-relevant improvements are:

- **Earlier help** for families with multiple/complex needs, before problems escalate, within a joined-up system of support and protection
- **Better continuity for families** (fewer disruptive handovers as needs change), supporting engagement and trust
- **Stronger multi-agency child protection**, through clearer arrangements and shared working across safeguarding partners and relevant agencies
- **More consistent use of Family Group Decision Making**, including strengthening family network solutions where safe and appropriate

Practice development, learning and implementation approach

Local updates describe practice development activity supporting implementation, including:

- Learning and practice collectives focused on developing the new Family Help Assessment, involving practitioners from across the service to shape something “helpful for families.”
- A continued emphasis on staff and service feedback mechanisms

These align with the national guide’s emphasis that reform is not prescriptive, should be **co-designed locally**, and should keep the voices of children, young people and families “at the heart of new service design.”

Workforce and operational readiness

The Newcastle FFP updates in February and March describe active recruitment and readiness activity, including advertised vacancies and a recruitment day, alongside messages that the programme is moving from consultation into implementation planning.

The key point is that Newcastle has communicated a focus on building capacity and strengthening the workforce to deliver the new arrangements.

What partners can do now

Based on the national guide’s expectations and Newcastle’s comms, partners can prepare by:

- Ensuring operational leads understand the developing Front Door / Family Help / Child Protection / Family Group Decision Making direction and how this affects local pathways
- Engaging in local co-design and learning activity where invited (the national guide stresses multi-agency design and implementation)
- Using the established [Families First contact](#) route referenced in updates for queries and feedback