**FAMILY MEETINGS – PRACTICE GUIDANCE**

**1. Existing Family Group Conference Provision.**

 This section sets out the criteria for when Family Meetings should be convened and circumstances when a Family Group Conference might be more appropriate.

**2. Family Group Conferences**

Family group conferences should be convened where:

* Children are the subjects of a Child Protection Plan and a family group conference is recommended as part of the child protection plan and firm decisions that the family can make have been identified;
* Children are subject to public law proceedings and/or the Court has directed a family group conference;
* Children are on the threshold of becoming accommodated (S20) or of public law proceedings;
* Children are accommodated or looked after and the family network is able to make decisions/plans around permanency for the children and contact arrangements. This also includes family group conferences as a recommendation from LAC reviews;
* Children are in permanent placements (Adoption, Special Guardianship, Child Arrangement Order) and the placement is at risk of breaking down and the family are able to make decision/plans for the child/young person's care.

**3. Family meetings**

A family meeting may be convened in any of the circumstances listed in section 2 in order to prevent delay to the child/children. The urgency and complexity of the situation should be the deciding factors. Family Meetings can be arranged and take place at short notice while the preparation required for Family Group Conferences can prohibit a quick response.

Normally family meetings would be chaired by the child's social worker. However, a referral can be made to the Family group conference service if the circumstances suggest the family would benefit from an independent chair. Advice regarding the best way forward can be sought from the Family Support Team Manager.

Examples of when a family meeting is most appropriate include:

* Where an urgent family meeting is required to prevent a child becoming accommodated or looked after and family members are able to meet at short notice;
* Where an urgent family meeting is required to secure a child's accommodation, safety or welfare, where family members are able to meet at short notice to make decisions/plans;
* Where all reasonable steps have been taken to gain consent from the person(s) with parental responsibility for a family group conference and this has proved negative and the wider family members are willing to meet to make decisions/plans with or for the child;
* Where families are working well with Children's Social Care services and there is agreement and good communication within the family network;
* If the family network is small and less than 4 adult family members can attend the family meeting;
* If there is only one issue, for example contact, that needs to be addressed.

**4. Arranging family meetings**

Family Meetings are meetings arranged and facilitated by the social care practitioner allocated to the child or the Senior Practitioner within the allocated worker’s service area as appropriate. Participants will be the child, where appropriate, the child’s immediate family and others within the family network as identified by the immediate family. The purpose of the Family Meeting is to share information with the family network sufficient to arrive at a solution to a particular issue related to a child and to agree a plan to prevent the situation from escalating or to keep the child safe**.**

Family Meetings should be held at the earliest possible opportunity. Where there is difficulty in contacting all members of the family network the meeting should not be delayed. A plan to consult with those who could not attend should be agreed at the meeting. The main principle behind Family Meetings is that they happen at the earliest stages of involvement to solve problems and to address risk of harm in the most effective and least invasive manner.

The family meeting belongs to the family and the child and they should determine who should participate in the meeting.

No professionals should be involved in the meeting other than the Social Worker/Senior Practitioner unless this is the expressed wish of the family.

**5. Consent**

Family meetings are a voluntary process and families have the right to choose whether to participate or not. It is the role of the allocated social worker to obtain and record the consent of the family. Consent must be recorded in writing and must be from at least one person with parental responsibility.

**6. Family Meeting Plan**

The Family Meeting is expected to arrive at an agreed plan that will be shared among the family network. This plan does not replace any existing plan, such as a Child Protection or Child In Need Plan. It should be incorporated into any existing plan. The Family Meeting Plan should be recorded on MOSAIC.

**7. Role of the Social Worker**

The allocated Social Worker is responsible for identifying with their manager/supervisor when a family meeting may assist.

The Social worker is responsible for agreeing with the family who will participate in the meeting, the venue, what information will be shared and the key issues that the meeting/plan will address.

The Social Worker will provide Business Support with the names and addresses of those to be invited so that invitations can be sent and a venue booked. When possible use the family home or other neutral venue.

**8. Role of the facilitator**

The allocated Social Worker is usually the best to facilitate family meetings due to knowledge of the case and existing relationships. Where this is not possible or advisable a Senior Practitioner from the same service area will take on this role.

The facilitator will explain the process to the meeting. This should be clearly outlined and the parameters defined. In most cases this will not require the full details of the case to be shared but professional judgement, level of risk and the wishes of the family should act as a guide.

The Facilitator will introduce the key issue/s to be addressed and ask that the meeting consider what they can do to support the family and child in relation to the issue/s.

The Facilitator will guide the meeting on what is possible/permissible and support the participants to come up with a Family plan that addresses the issue/s. The Facilitator will make the final decision on whether the Family Plan is acceptable where there is potential risk to the child.

The Facilitator will distribute the Family Plan to those involved and record that a meeting has taken place in a case note on MOSAIC. Plans will be uploaded into MOSAIC by the Facilitator.

The standard Agenda for Family meetings should be used in all cases – see **Appendix 1.**

Appendix 1

Family Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions. All introduce themselves. Complete a simple family tree to establish relationships, include PR, existing court orders and informal care arrangements.

2. Why we are having this meeting. The Social Worker will explain what it is Social Care are worried about and what it is hoped the meeting can achieve.

3. What the parents think needs to happen. Parents must have the opportunity to explain what they think the current circumstances are and what needs to change.

4. What the family network thinks needs to happen. The extended family should be given the opportunity to feedback to Social Care and to the parents their views of the current circumstances and what needs to change.

5. What, if anything, can each family network member do to support the children and their parents?

6. Is anyone willing and able to offer permanent or temporary care for any of the children? If applicable.

 7. What will happen next? The Social Worker will explain what assessments will take place. They will provide information about how kinship carers can be supported (including financially) and what legal orders may be needed as applicable. The Social Worker may discuss whether court action is required by Social Care or the family as required.

8. Family Plan. A plan with clear actions and timescales that identifies individuals responsible for each action will be drawn up, agreed and distributed. Review points should be agreed when a further Family Meeting is required. Consideration should be given to how the Family Plan will be incorporated into existing CIN/CP plans.