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The purpose of a Family Group Conference

In any decision making process in respect of children, it is essential the child and their parents are fully involved.

The Family Group Conference approach to planning believes the best people to make decisions about the life of a child or young person are usually their family, including their extended family and trusted friends. They should be central to the planning and decision making about the child's life, even if the child lives elsewhere.

A Family Group Conference seeks to help the child's family find solutions to their problems in meeting the child's needs. The decision making is done by the child and family, supported by professionals, ensuring that the power and responsibility for the child's life stays with his or her family.

The desired outcome of a Family Group Conference is for the family to produce a Family Plan, which takes ownership of the family's difficulties and sets out what the wider network of family and friends will do in order to keep the child(ren) safe, cared for and nurtured.

A Family Plan will be subject to endorsement by the Local Authority, however should be promoted as a vehicle of positive change for the family.

Research has demonstrated that a successful Family Group Conference can produce safe and secure alternatives to Local Authority care for children.

The London Borough of Hillingdon is of the view that so long as a Family Plan is safe, legal and addresses the concerns; then this should be agreed in principle with the minimum amount of state intervention.

The Family Group Conference model

The Referral



The Conference

- Information giving
- Private family time
- Family plan presented and agreed



Implementation of the Family Plan



Review of the Family Plan

The current level of service intervention and referral criteria

A Family Group Conference can be introduced at different levels of social work practice. At this time (January 2013) the current threshold for referrals to the Family Group Conference Service are cases that are on the brink of Local Authority care.

The specific target areas within this threshold are cases subject to Public Law Outline (PLO) and children whom are voluntarily accommodated under S20 (CA1989). The majority of children in this group will be subject to a Child Protection Plan.

Rehabilitation plans, where the Local Authority is formalising support for looked-after children to return back to their families, will also be a target area.

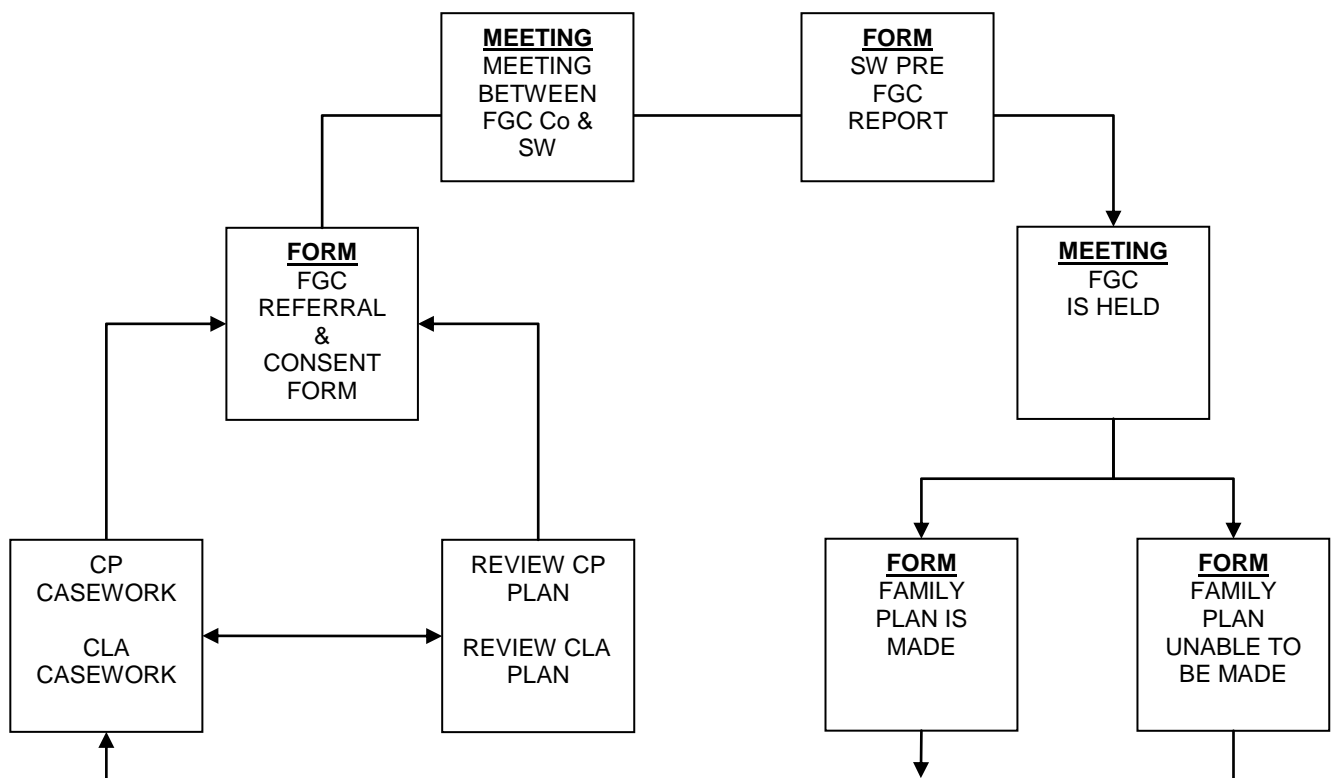
Discussions will be ongoing regarding the FGC service being offered to children who are supported under Child In Need plans. However, at the current time this is not within the referral criteria.

The referral criteria

- The case is open to Children's Social Care and a Social Worker is allocated.
- Cases in which PLO has been initiated.
- Cases in which the child is voluntarily accommodated under S20 (CA1989).
- Cases in which the Courts have directed an FGC takes place.
- A looked-after child who is returning to their families' care and rehabilitation plans include an FGC.
- The person(s) with Parental Responsibility (PR) agree and have provided written consent.

How FGC will fit into existing CP and CLA plans

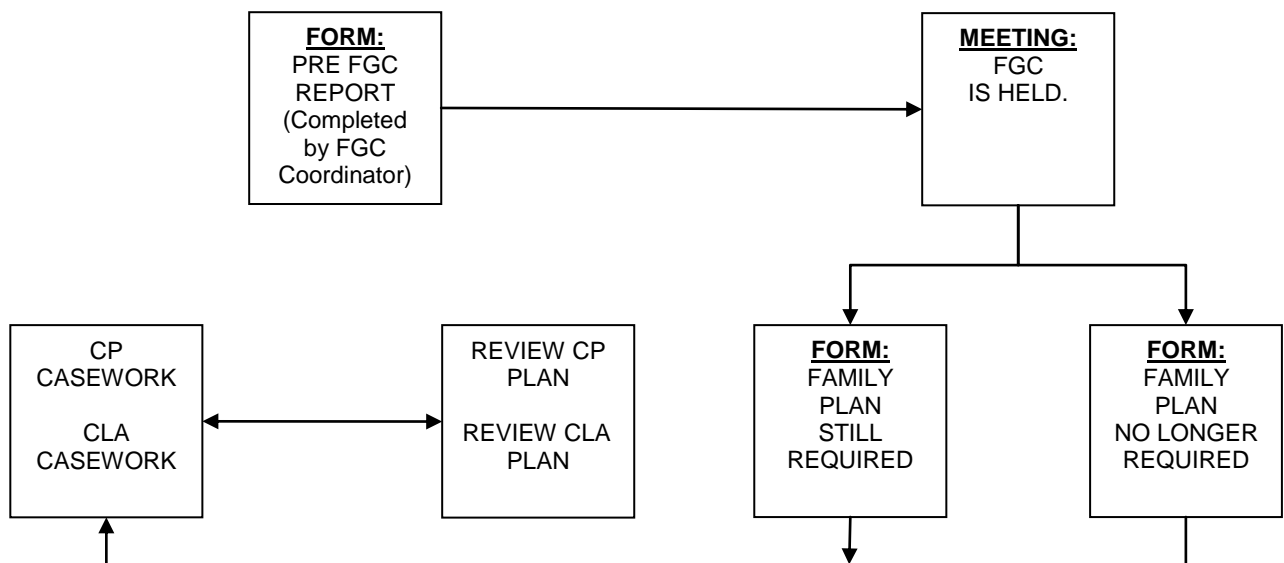
- **CP and CLA Casework:** Indicates active social work and the implementation of either a CP or CLA plan.
- **Review CP and Review CLA Plan:** Indicates the review meetings of either the CP or CLA plan
- The outcomes of the FGC feed directly back to the casework team / social worker. There is no need to delay feedback until the next review of either the CP or CLA plan. The social worker can request for reviews to be brought forward.



To be viewed alongside the FGC process

How the review of FGC will fit into existing CP and CLA plans

- The Family plan will initially be reviewed after 2- 3 months. Depending on the nature of each individual case.
- The FGC Coordinator will gather information 2 weeks before the FGC review and prepare a Pre FGC report.
- The FGC Coordinator will make arrangements to see and speak with the child(ren) before the Review FGC to obtain their wishes and feelings.
- The children’s social worker will be present at the review FGC, in order to agree decisions made by the family.
- **CP and CLA Casework:** Indicates active social work and the implementation of either a CP or CLA plan.
- **Review CP and CLA Plan:** Indicates the Review meetings of either the CP or CLA plan.
- The outcomes of the Review FGC feed directly back to the casework team / social worker. There is no need to delay feedback until the next review of either the CP or CLA plan.



To be viewed alongside the FGC process

The FGC process

1. Identification / Referral

- The referring social worker will discuss a referral to the FGC service with their manager to establish an appropriate referral.
- The social worker will discuss the purpose and process of an FGC with the person(s) with Parental Responsibility (PR).
- The person(s) with PR needs to complete a consent form providing their written permission to a FGC taking place and to the sharing of information regarding their family.
- Important: The FGC cannot proceed unless the person(s) holding PR agrees.
- The social worker at this stage will obtain a list of extended family and friends whom the person(s) holding PR would wish to attend the FGC. Contact names and address should be sought.
- A referral form will be completed and submitted to the FGC service complete with the consent form. This referral form will consist of the child(ren)'s basic demographics and a brief description of the concerns. This will form part I of the 2-stage referral process.
- The FGC service will provide an outcome to the referrer within 5 days of receiving the referral.
- Should a referral not be deemed appropriate; the Family Group Conference Manager will contact the referrer to explain the reasons for this decision.
- For positive referrals, the Family Group Conference Coordinator will contact the referrer to establish a meeting with the referrer, to be held within the same 5 day period. This meeting will form part II of the referral process. The agenda for this meeting will be as follows:
 - Cultural and communication needs of the family.
 - A brief description of Children's Services involvement.
 - The current plan of Children's Services.
 - The 'Bottom line' issues of: Safeguarding concerns, desired outcomes and what Children's Services will do if there is not a Family Plan that addresses the needs of the Child/Young Person?
 - Identification of any person(s) who should be excluded from the FGC as they are deemed a risk to children.
 - Resources available to the family from Children's Services, to include discussion regarding any financial support, or one-off payments from the department.
 - What questions Children's Services have for the family to consider in Private Family Time.
 - Guidance to be given, if required, to the referrer regarding completing the Social Worker's pre FGC report.
 - Provisional FGC dates to be discussed for week 5 or 6.

2. Preparation

- A letter will be sent out to the person(s) with PR within the same 5 day period (by the end of week 1) from the point of a referral being accepted. This letter will include a leaflet explaining what a FGC is and will advise that a FGC coordinator will be contacting them within the next few days.
- This letter may also include age appropriate information for children explaining to the child what a FGC is, as well as what it is not.
- The person(s) with PR will be given the opportunity to complete a pre FGC report also. This is a brief one page document that holds the titles "What do you see as the strengths in your family? What do you see as the difficulties in your family? Are there any comments you wish to make". There is no requirement for this to be completed, however it is seen as an inclusive tool from the start of the FGC process.
- The FGC coordinator will arrange an initial meeting with the person(s) with PR within a further 5 days from the sit down meeting with the referrer (by the end of week 2). This is to take the form of a home visit.

Initial home visit to person(s) with PR and to the child(ren)

- The FGC coordinator is to see and speak with both the person(s) with PR and the child(ren) at their home.
- The person(s) with PR and the child(ren) will be informed of the process of the FGC (the FGC coordinator will refer to the letter and leaflet sent in week 1), ensuring that the family are aware that the FGC is an independent service.
- The FGC coordinator will explain the format of a FGC and the desired outcome of the family producing a Family Plan.
- The FGC coordinator will impress the level of concerns that the Children's Safeguarding Team have presented. This will take the form of a separate discussion with the person(s) with PR.
- The person(s) with PR at this point may wish not to proceed with an FGC. This will be recorded as a lack of willingness to engage.
- In instances where there are two persons with PR and only one person wishes to proceed, this is sufficient to convene a FGC. The opposing party's choice will be recorded as a lack of willingness to engage.
- A child may decline the offer of a FGC if they are aged over 16 years of age. However, their attendance and contribution will not be mandatory if they are aged less than 16 years and opposed to a FGC being held. This FGC model is one of empowerment for the child and their family. The child's wishes, feelings and involvement are considered of crucial importance, but should not be undermined if a child is clearly opposed to attending.
- Decision making as to who will be involved in the FGC is as follows:

- The FGC coordinator will refresh the person with PR, of the information they gave to the social worker at the point of referral. This will offer a second opportunity for the person with PR and the child, to add or remove people from this list.
- The child must always be involved in the process of identifying who should attend their FGC, however the child does not have a veto on who should be involved unless they are over 16 years of age. It is the responsibility of the person(s) with PR to decide who will be involved.
- The child should also be offered the option of an independent advocate or supporter to help them. In the event that neither is available; the FGC coordinator can act as this role, as they are independent from case management decisions.
- The FGC coordinator should offer the child time alone to talk about their wishes and feelings.
- During this visit the FGC coordinator will explore cultural aspects of the family and how the FGC may need to accommodate these (e.g. interpreter services).
- The FGC coordinator and the person(s) with PR will agree a provisional date and time for the FGC to take place.

Preparation meetings with family members, friends and identified professionals

The FGC coordinator will make arrangements to hold discussion with all adults who will be involved at the FGC. This will take the form of home visits, office appointments and telephone calls. The agenda for these discussions will be as follows:

- To explain the format of the FGC and the desired outcome of the family producing a Family Plan.
- To explore cultural aspects of the family and how the FGC may need to accommodate these (e.g. interpreter services).
- To impress the level of concern that Children's Services have presented and the possible consequences of the family being unable to safely agree a Family Plan.
- By the 15th day, at the latest, final arrangements will have been agreed as to when and where the FGC will take place. The FGC coordinator will send out confirmation letters to all involved.
- It is anticipated that there may be difficulties in coordinating a time and date convenient for all involved. However the overarching view on this should be that significant adults in the child's life should be able to make the necessary arrangements within a 2-3 week notice period.
- The FGC Coordinator will ensure that practical preparations, such as food and drink that will be made available at the FGC, are confirmed and discussed with the child(ren).

Follow-up home visit to person(s) with PR and to the child(ren)

- The purpose of this visit is to speak with the child(ren) regarding their effective preparation and involvement at the meeting.
- This visit will take place the week before the FGC is convened.
- The FGC coordinator is to talk with the child(ren) about how best his or her views can be presented at the meeting.
- The FGC coordinator will collect the Parent/Carer's statement if this has been completed.
- Throughout the preparation time scales of weeks 2, 3, 4 and 5 the FGC Coordinator should be available by phone to all involved and in person to the child, in the form of further home visits, if requested. This is especially the case if the child has no advocate or supporter.

The social worker's pre FGC report

This will need to be completed one week before the FGC takes place, in order for it to be distributed to the attendees of the FGC. There should, in principle, be no new information on the day of the conference.

3. The Family Group Conference (FGC)

- The FGC is not a time or place for assessment.
- The only document to arise from the FCG is the Family Plan. Minute taking is barred, however written memory aids can be taken and should be shared with the family.
- 2 rooms will always be booked at the venue to allow time for Private Family Time and a space for the child(ren) who may wish not to, or are unable to contribute fully to their FGC.
- The Social Worker and the Family Group Conference Coordinator will remain present from start to finish of the FGC. (It is important to note that FGC's may take place in the early evenings or at weekends).
- The chair (FGC Coordinator / Manager) will welcome all to the meeting and explain the process of the meeting.
- Cultural aspects will have been observed leading up to the FGC and interpreter services, if needed, will have been arranged.
- Refreshments will be made available throughout.

The FGC comprises of three stages.

Stage 1: Information giving

- The chair will distribute the Social worker's Pre FGC report and the Parent's statement if completed.
- The concerns and questions that the Children's Safeguarding Team have, will be presented by the Social Worker to the family.
- A key principle is that the family will be presented with clear information and an understanding of resources; in order to enable them to make informed decisions.

Stage 2: Private family time

- No professionals shall enter this discussion.
- The family will determine the membership of this private discussion.
- There is no specific duration or limit to this time.
- The child(ren) may or may not be part of this discussion

Stage 3: Plan presented and agreed

- A key principle is that a Family Plan should be agreed by the referring agency (typically the Children's Safeguarding Team) unless this places the child(ren) at risk of harm.
- There may be a need for endorsement of a proposed Family Plan from the social worker's manager / team manager. This to be sought within 2 days of the FGC at the latest.
- For cases that have already entered Care Proceedings, the Local Authority will need to make clear to the family that their agreement to a plan will ultimately be subject to the Court's decision.
- A date to review the Family Plan will be agreed and a Review FGC will be arranged to be convened within 2-3 months. The children's social worker is to be present at the FGC review, in order to confirm decisions.
- The FGC Coordinator will suggest that the family nominate a member to be responsible for this plan. The nominated member will act as a hub for communication in the family and to ensure that the family follow their own proposals.
- The Family, the Social Worker and the Family Group Conference Coordinator will all sign the agreed Family Plan. This will be typed and distributed (with a copy of the original handwritten plan) within 2 days.

Family Group Conference timetable

Week One	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Referral Part I completed (Identifying a list of people to be involved in the FGC)▪ Consent form completed (Signed by the person whom has PR)▪ FGC information pack and letter sent to person whom has PR and the child(ren)▪ Referral Part II completed
Week Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Initial Home Visit to Person(s) with PR and to the child(ren).▪ The FGC coordinator and the person(s) with PR should agree a date and time for the FGC to take place.▪ FGC preparation commences.
Week Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ FGC preparation continues.▪ FGC venue arrangements must be completed and confirmation letters sent to all people who will be involved in the FGC.
Week Four	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ FGC preparation continues.
Week Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ SW pre meeting report is completed and distributed.▪ FGC Coordinator carries out a follow-up home visit to person(s) with PR and to the child(ren) the week before the FGC is due to be held.
Week Six	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ FGC takes place and review FGC is scheduled.▪ Family Plan is distributed no longer than 2 days after the FGC (With Family Evaluation feedback forms).

Appendix - forms required

- a) FGC Information Leaflet: Family and Friends
- b) Referral Form part I and II
- c) Consent Form (to be completed by person(s) with PR).
- d) Social Worker's Pre-FGC report.
- e) FGC Coordinator's Review FGC report
- f) Parent/Carer's FGC statement.
- g) Family Plan