

Family Group Decision Making – Cabinet Summary

Family group decision-making (FGDM) is an umbrella term for voluntary, family-led decision-making forums in which a child's family network has all the resources, adequate preparation, relevant information, and a safe and appropriate environment to make plans in response to concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing, working alongside skilled professionals. Family Group Conference (FGC) is the only evidence-based model of Family group decision-making. In both domestic and international studies, family group conferences have been shown to be highly effective in supporting families, improving decision-making processes, and diverting children from care.

Working Together to Safeguard Children updated in 2026, the Families First Partnership Programme and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 all emphasise the importance of involving families in decision-making whilst the latter legislation mandates the offer of family group decision-making before a Local authority issues care proceedings.

Kent has over 20 years' experience in delivering family group conferences. With the support of the Family Rights Group and their national accreditation standards, Kent has built a service that is embedded into all areas of children's services. We currently offer family group conferences for families accessing Early Help services, Child in Need, Child Protection, children at the edge of care and children in care. Kent's policy on family group conferences has long included the offer of a Family Group conference prior to the Local Authority issuing care proceedings. We also offer family group conferences to support reunification, for children who go missing, unborn children and community-based conferences addressing contextual risks. In addition, the service offers 'Lifelong Links' support with a focus on promoting relationships for children in care with their family and friends to support identity and belonging. Kent has a nationally accredited Family Group Conference and Lifelong Links service.

Over the past 18 months the service has developed an early intervention offer with the introduction of 12 Social Connections Assistants. An evaluation of this new role in October 2025 highlighted that children were less likely to enter care when a rapid response family meeting was convened.

Since January 2026, the family group decision making Task and Finish Group has supported Kent's Family First Programme by developing the practice model, guidance, and training, while gathering feedback from families and practitioners. It has also widened the offer through national collaboration and exploration of parental advocacy.

Kent is in a strong position to develop further its family group conference offer and be a national example in this area. To fully meet the requirements set out in the Families First Partnership Programme and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 Kent will launch a training module for practitioners and managers, develop a communications strategy for family group decision-making, pilot a peer parental

advocacy service to ensure family experiences are at the heart of the way we practice.