

# Frequently Asked Questions

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## The Basics

### What is Families First? Is it a new service?

Families First is not a service. In Hertfordshire, early help services come together under the 'Families First' branding to work together to support families, the overall aim of which is to empower local families and services to work collaboratively in order to evidence and sustain improvements in the family. This means you won't 'refer' to Families First. You will work in a

Families First way, using the local Families First structures and resources available to you – more information below.

The key principles that Families First is based on are:

-  Be empowering and focus on building resilience and family strengths;
-  Promote personal responsibility and not create dependency;
-  Be flexible in providing longer and shorter term support depending on the needs of the family;
-  Involve as few professionals as possible, who can coordinate and prioritise support to make things simpler and more manageable for families;
-  Work with whole families, including fathers and other family members;
-  Leave parents, children and young people feeling that the situation has improved for them;
-  Promote life skills for young people including; alcohol and substance misuse awareness, education, sex and relationships, financial skills, cultural awareness, community cohesion and sustainable living;
-  Be based, and designed, within communities, making the most of local resources and delivering services at the most local level;
-  Provide a seamless interface between specialist services with a critical focus on the needs and safety of children and young people.

### Does Families First replace the Thriving Families teams?

Under Families First the Thriving Families teams will continue to support the most intensive early help cases just as they do now. To tie in with the overall move to Families First, the **Thriving Families teams will become known as Intensive Families First Support Teams from 1 September 2016.**

Families First is a lot wider than the intensive support that Thriving Families provide, so it doesn't replace Thriving Families. You will be providing support through your existing services using the Families First structures and resources available to you locally.

The Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board is [currently consulting on the 'continuum of needs' document](#) to clarify the levels of need covered by Families First.

## Families First Hubs

### What is a Families First local hub?

A Families First local hub will be the way Families First is set up in each area. It will include a mix of staff from different disciplines and we're currently working with local partners on how they will look and how they will interact with other services and teams within Children's Services.

It's not about creating new physical locations, but there will be an emphasis on more cohesive and co-ordinated working. Each hub will have:

-  Local delivery and governance arrangements.
-  Families First Panels to triage requests for targeted and intensive support; this will reduce contacts into Children's Services and in particular the high proportion of contacts which result in advice and guidance only. Families with 'emerging needs' will be the matter of a single agency response and therefore will not require a request for support through the Families First Panel.

-  Families First Co-ordinators providing a rapid response and timely support to families at the earliest opportunity and supporting partners to understand their roles and responsibilities.
-  Families First Keyworkers based within teams and partner agencies that will coordinate the planning and delivery of the family plan.
-  Multi-disciplinary teams responding locally to need and taking responsibility for ensuring that the needs are supported within the locality rather than the 'referral on' culture. This builds on the learning from the Family Safeguarding Teams.

### **What will the areas be? When will the local hubs be rolled out to them?**

We plan to have nine Families First local hubs, essentially on a district basis but with Watford and Three Rivers combined into one area. There are three pathfinder areas that commenced rollout in October 2016. The pathfinder areas are Stevenage, Broxbourne and Watford & Three Rivers. The target date for completing the rollout across the county is February 2017.

### **I've heard people talking about Families First Triage Panels. What will these be?**

Triage Panels will be small groups which meet weekly in each of the Families First areas to triage / allocate new cases, including cases stepped down by the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which need targeted or intensive early help support locally. Each Panel will have core functions:

-  Ensure multi-agency commitment in achieving successful outcomes for children, young people and their families.
-  Provide advice and guidance on thresholds.
-  Signpost to most appropriate service.
-  Triage cases.
-  Agree level of intervention required (emerging, targeted or intensive).
-  Support the use of the Families First Assessment, Graded Care Profile (GCP) in order to prioritise support to meet assessed level of need.
-  Enhance the effectiveness of multi-agency working, ensuring that services are coordinated not duplicated.
-  Review requests for support which require a multi-agency support and identify the lead agency/Family Key worker.
-  Identify, manage and coordinate responses to escalation in risk factors where the safeguarding threshold has not been met.
-  Promote evidence based interventions, mediation, family group conferencing, brief therapy, motivational interviewing.

### **Will Action & Impact Meetings stay the same?**

The Families First Action & Impact Meetings will continue with the same name, and will continue to review cases of concern, which have made little or no progress and advise on appropriate interventions. They will also manage the Step up / Step down process and promote evidence based interventions, mediation, family group conferencing, brief therapy and motivational interviewing.

They will change slightly so that they cover the nine Families First areas rather than the current five double-districts. How this works in practice will be decided locally, although all Action & Impact Meetings will be subject to the countywide Action & Impact framework. The terms of reference have been updated and are available on the Families First Portal.

### **I have a family who are not progressing. How do I ensure they get the support they need?**

If you have a family who are 'stuck' you can bring the case to your local Families First Action & Impact meeting. This is a meeting of professionals from your area who will consider the case and see what other approaches or support they can suggest. You will be asked to present the case to

the meeting stating clearly what you hope to get from the meeting. You'll need to summarise the issues the family are facing, what you've done to support them so far and what the biggest barriers are to them progressing, in your opinion. You're welcome to stay for the whole meeting if you want to, so you can help other agencies with their stuck cases too. Guidance about presenting cases is available on the [Families First Portal](#).

### **Can I observe an Action & Impact Meeting to see what they're like?**

We're always happy to have observers at the meetings, as long as your line manager is happy for you to attend. You'll need to get in touch with Anne-Marie Thornburn, the Independent Chair for the meetings, before you can attend to observe.

### **How will you avoid the nine areas running things differently?**

It's fine for the nine areas to work in different ways, in fact we expect them to work differently so that they can prioritise their local needs. Each area will still need to work to the [Families First Principles](#) and meet the five key features of the model for consistent localised working which are listed [above](#).

There are draft terms of reference to guide local working in the ways we expect, and each local area will answer to their local partnership board, which will in turn be responsible to the central Families First governance structure.

### **How will we develop an understanding of local needs and future needs within our area, and act on this?**

Each area will have a local implementation group, which will be in place while Families First is rolled out in that area and which will make decisions about how Families First should work best locally. These groups are expected to continue beyond this initial phase, but how long they continue will be determined locally.

The local implementation group might be set up specifically for this task, or it could be a role taken on by an existing group such as the local Action & Impact Meeting. This will be decided locally.

The implementation group will also decide what approach to take to the local partnership board, which will be responsible for overseeing Families First in the local area. As with the local implementation group, this could be a meeting set up specifically for the purpose or it could be decided locally that the role should be taken on by an existing forum such as the Local Strategic Partnership.

There will also be central support to help monitor performance and trends in each of the areas.

### **How will you manage the risk of repeated requests for support for the same family being repeatedly signposted where actually co-ordinated support is needed?**

Requests for support which result in signposting, advice or guidance will be recorded on the EHM (Early Help Module) computer system. This will be the IT system central to Families First and will be used by the weekly triage panel to see any previous contacts, even where a family has moved around the county.

## **Workforce and practice**

### **How will you make sure that the workforce has the skills they need to work with families?**

Hopefully you took part in the recent Families First training needs questionnaire, which received over 800 responses. The questionnaire was developed jointly with the Domestic Abuse Improvement Board and will be used to develop a comprehensive learning and development

programme. More information about the Learning & Development Programme will be available later in the Autumn.

We are offering workforce shadowing. The Workforce Shadowing Framework is being refreshed to foster a greater understanding amongst the Families First workforce of roles and responsibilities beyond their own service, enabling more effective integrated working. This will be launched in September 2016 and the Families First workforce development team is currently seeking sign up from services across the sectors involved in delivering Families First services.

You can find training and the Workforce Shadowing Programme available to you as part of Families First on [the Portal](#).

### **How will I request support for a family?**

Requests for support will be made on a local basis by emailing the relevant hub (email addresses will be publicised when the hubs roll out to each area). The request will be discussed by the Triage Panel to see what kind of support is needed, for example if you can lead on work with the family yourself, just involving your agency, if you can lead on the work yourself but will need support from other teams, or if the family need support from one of the intensive teams.

It's important to remember that for Families First we are talking about requests for support rather than referrals, as in most cases you'll continue to work with the family but will be supported by the other agencies and resources within Families First to help you do that.

### **How will information sharing be facilitated between partners?**

An information sharing protocol has been developed for Families First with input from the county council's data protection team. It will be available for use at a local hub level and locally signed protocols can be uploaded onto the [Families First Portal](#), if the local hubs wish. You will still need to ensure you have consent from a family to share their details before you share with a local triage panel.

### **What is happening to the CAF and eCAF? What is the Families First Assessment?**

The Families First Assessment (FFA) will replace the existing CAF. It will be hosted on the Early Help Module (more information [in the next question](#)). We have worked with practitioners to make the FFA more user-friendly than the previous CAF. There were a series of demonstrations of the FFA run for partners in July 2016 and the feedback we received about the system and the new forms was encouraging. Training on the system commenced in September 2016 and the details of dates and locations for training can be found on the [Families First Assessment \(FFA\) / EHM System Training page](#) of the [Families First Portal](#).

After EHM and the Families First Assessment are introduced they will be used for any new cases. Existing cases which are open on eCAF will remain on that system until they close.

### **There are a lot of different computer systems used by agencies covered by Families First. How will these work together?**

We realise that agencies all have their own systems and will continue to use them. These will be supplemented with the Early Help Module (EHM), which will be the main system used by county council staff involved in Families First, and which will host the multi-agency Families First Assessment (replacing eCAF). You will be able to securely log in to EHM from your work computer and will have access to training and support to help you use the system. You will need to access EHM to carry out your Families First Assessments and to record case information relating to them.

EHM will be rolled out to teams in the county council from September 2016, and to partner agencies from 7 November 2016.

In time we will also be introducing a 'single view' element to EHM which will allow multi-agency partners working across EHM and other linked systems (including social care) to see basic shared information about each family.

**Will you be developing guidance for practitioners and operational guidance?**

Yes – these are being worked on at the moment and will be shared once they're ready.

**I haven't seen very much publicity about Families First. Will there be more?**

While we've still been working and consulting on the strategic developments for Families First and establishing the structure that it will work to, it's been difficult to publicise the transformational changes that are required. You will see more in the coming months about Families First. The best places to find out about what's going on are the [Families First Portal](#) (which also has a [dedicated practitioner area](#)) and the [Families First newsletter](#), which you can [subscribe](#) to so you always get the latest news hot off the press!

**I have tools that I use with families that I think would be useful to other practitioners. Can I suggest resources for the Practitioner Area of the Families First Portal?**

Many of you use web links and local templates in your daily professional lives to speed up your processes and/or working practices. You may have one or more resources that you currently use which would be of benefit to other practitioners too. [This form](#) allows you to provide us with details about those resources including useful research reports and publications.

All submissions are reviewed for suitability before they're added to the portal. If you have any queries please contact [familiesfirstportal@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:familiesfirstportal@hertfordshire.gov.uk).

## Families

**Can families self-help?**

Yes they can. Families may not want support from a service, but they may still have concerns that they can address themselves with the right information and tools. The [Families First Portal](#) is the 'go-to' place to find information about all sorts of problems that may affect families, so they can help themselves.

**What resources will be available for families being supported by agencies in the Families First way?**

There will be a range of resources available through the Families First hubs, including a continuation of the personalised commissioning arrangements currently available for CAFs, support from the Intensive Families First Support Teams (formerly known as Thriving Families Teams), the Families First Assessment (replacing eCAF) and Outcomes Star as tools of choice. Additionally there will be access to mediation, brief therapy, motivational interviewing and family group conferencing. Practitioners and families will also be able to visit the [Families First Portal](#) to find information that can help them address family problems.

There are other resources we're hoping to put in place but which are waiting on funding agreements. These include funding specifically to support the voluntary and community sector and a partnership fund for localised commissioning.

**Are you involving families in how Families First is developed?**

We spoke to a lot of families and service users early on in the development of Families First to hear what they want and expect from early help services. We're working at the moment to run some more consultation groups to revisit what they need from services, how self-help can best work for them and to seek their views on the [Portal](#).