

**NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL**

**DECISION OF COUNCILLOR JAN BARBER  
THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE'S SERVICES with advice from the  
DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES**



**DECISION NO: P&C53**

**SUBJECT: Decision to outsource the North Somerset Council Family Group Conferencing service and hold an open tender to let contract to an external provider**

**DECISION:**

Agreement and approval is sought to:

- Agree to outsource the Family Group Conferencing Service
- Agree the proposed budget of £60,000 per year and contract term of three years plus option to extend for two (£180,000 contract value for three years, plus £120,000 for additional two) for the Family Group Conferencing service. Total contract value will be £300,000.
- Hold a competitive open tender exercise to find a suitable provider
- Agree a price Vs quality split for the evaluation of the tender of 50/50

**BACKGROUND:**

Family Group Conferencing<sup>1</sup> (FGC) has been provided by North Somerset Council to families for over 13 years. The service has mainly serviced the Childcare Social Work teams.

38 referrals were received during the period 1/4/15 to 31/3/16. The majority of referrals and conferences fall within the scope of Child in Need; Child Protection; CLA and Family Proceedings.

The majority of neighbouring Local Authorities who provide a FGC service do so through a contract let with an external provider.

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<sup>1</sup> Information from the current Family Group Conference Project Co-ordinator – appendix 1

**Reasons:**

Outsourcing the service should support the Council to deliver the service within the specified budget. In turn this could mean a larger service to more families that we are currently able to offer.

By being able to enter into a competitive tender, we will be able to seek solutions from the market on how to offer a quality service for the best value.

**Other Alternatives Considered:**

There has been an ongoing review of the service since 2014, and the following options have been explored:

| Option   | Reason  |
|--|---|
| 1. Retain the existing in house project.                                   | An internal review of the project in 2014 showed that we were overspending on the budget. This was due to several factors, the main expense being the costs of training and retaining FGC Co-ordinators.<br><br>To maintain the quality of service in-house there would need to be a further review of the service, and an increase in the service budget to meet the needs.      |
| 2. Spot purchase service on an ad-hoc basis.                               | Possible – however a contract with agreed prices with one provider is more likely, with an option to spot purchase over and above the budget if needed.   |
| 3. Explore buy in or consortium arrangements with other Local Authorities. | This has been explored and although there is some interest, North Somerset Council's project is behind schedule. The service will be tendered in such a way that our neighbouring Local Authority partners will be able to join at a later date. A larger, pooled budget could give us greater buying power in the future when we come to re-tender the contract in 2020 onwards. |
| 4. External tender and delivery by independent providers.                  | Preferred option – with an element of option 2.   |
| 5. No FGC delivery within North Somerset                                   | Not likely as FGC delivery is a key service for Children's Social Care and the wider social care agenda in North Somerset.  |

Each option has been scoped out, and the Project Group<sup>2</sup> has recommended option four to be the most suitable for the following reasons:

- The average internal cost of a FGC (including a management contribution) was circa £2,066<sup>3</sup>. This varies greatly from one FGC to the next depending on the needs of the family.

<sup>2</sup> Representatives from Contracts and Commissioning Team, Procurement Team, Service Leader from Community Family Team, Finance Team and Legal Team and Assistant Director for Support and Safeguarding.

<sup>3</sup> 2015/16. The figure is per referral. There were 38 referrals and a total project cost of £78,499

- Market testing has suggested that this option could produce significant reductions in cost.
- The average cost of training a new FGC Co-ordinator, including induction shadowing, is approximately £2000, although this can vary widely depending on the FGC co-ordinator’s previous work experience and skill set. By outsourcing we are able to delegate these costs to a providers, and obtain a price that incorporates this.

**Financial Implications:**

The internal service has a budget of £56,000 per year. However, the forecast spend for 2016/17 is £76,000. This overspend is attributed this year to staffing<sup>4</sup> costs and the cost of training new Co-ordinators. There are also the associated ‘on costs’ such as pension contributions associated with an internalised service. There is a budget of £25,000 for casual co-ordinators, however actual costs are in the region of £46,000 for 2016/17.

In September of last year a scope of our neighbouring authorities (South Gloucestershire, Bristol and Wiltshire – B&NES do not currently provide FGC) showed that on average a FGC from start to finish costs between £1,000 and £1,500. All three Authorities commission services from external provider(s).

We will be looking to ask the market for ideas on how to get the most FGC’s for the budget available whilst ensuring a quality service. By being able to offer more FGCs we are able to support more families which in turn can lead to less demand on Child Care Social Services. By seeking a three year contract we are able to support the winning provider to develop and imbed the service and provide a level of consistency.

The budget holder is currently Sadie Hall, Weston East Community Family Team Service Leader.

**Implications for Future Years:**

If agreed, the contract value will be £300,000 for five years. The first three years will be fixed at £180,000 total. If we decide to continue the service, we may extend the contract for up to two years with a total cost of up to £120,000.

The decision to extend will be based upon the provider’s performance and outcomes they have achieved over the three year initial period.

Signed: .....  
Councillor Jan Barber  
Executive Member for Children and Young People’s Services

Dated: .....

<sup>4</sup> Co-ordinators are on casual contracts and costs vary according to the number and complexity of the FGC referrals.

**Reviewed:** .....  
Gerald Hunt, Head of Commissioning

**Confirmation of advice given:**

Signed: .....  
Sheila Smith  
Director, People and Communities

Dated: .....

## Appendix one

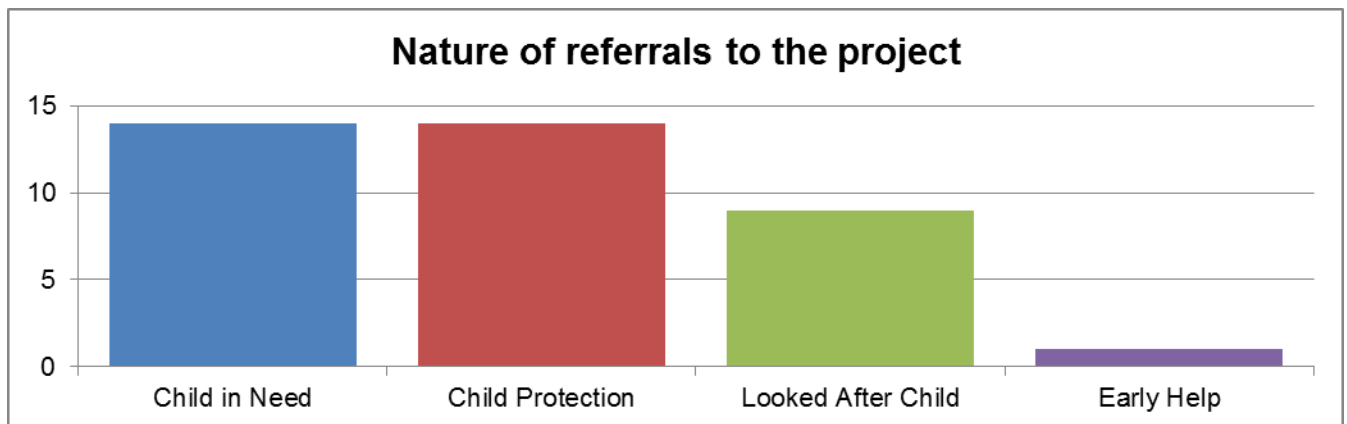
### North Somerset Council Family Group Conference Project Summary - May 2016

This document is an update to the document produced in September 2015.

#### Background

The project was established 13 years ago within Children and Young People's Services and since then has mainly serviced the Childcare Social Work teams with a handful of conferences held for schools.

The project's scope originally was to deliver 20 FGCs per year and recruit and train 5 co-ordinators. The project has grown in response to demand with a corresponding increase in co-ordinator numbers. 38 referrals were received during the period 1/4/15 to 31/3/16 (not all referrals will proceed to an actual meeting). The majority of referrals and conferences order fall within the scope of Child in Need; Child Protection; CLA and Family Proceedings.



#### Going Forward

A strategic meeting was held on 19/8/14 to consider five options:

- 1) Retain the existing in house project.
- 2) Spot Purchase.
- 3) Explore buy in or consortium arrangements with other Local Authorities. For example, Berkshire are now purchasing from Reading Council. Our close neighbours including Bristol do not have any FGC service at present, however Somerset are in the process of setting up an in-house trial project.
- 4) External tender and delivery by independent providers.
- 5) No FGC delivery within North Somerset. This is contrary to local strategic thinking; recommendations by Family Justice Review Final Report (November 2011); Ofsted inspection grading criteria and overall national delivery with increasing acknowledgment

by Central and Local Government as to the benefits of the FGC model and consequent investment.

There was agreement at the meeting to continue with the status quo, with delivery in house, recruit an interim project co-ordinator, and work up a proposal for tendering in the longer term. A 'Testing the Market' exercise took place during the summer of 2015 and 20 organisations, with varying expertise in the FGC model, responded.

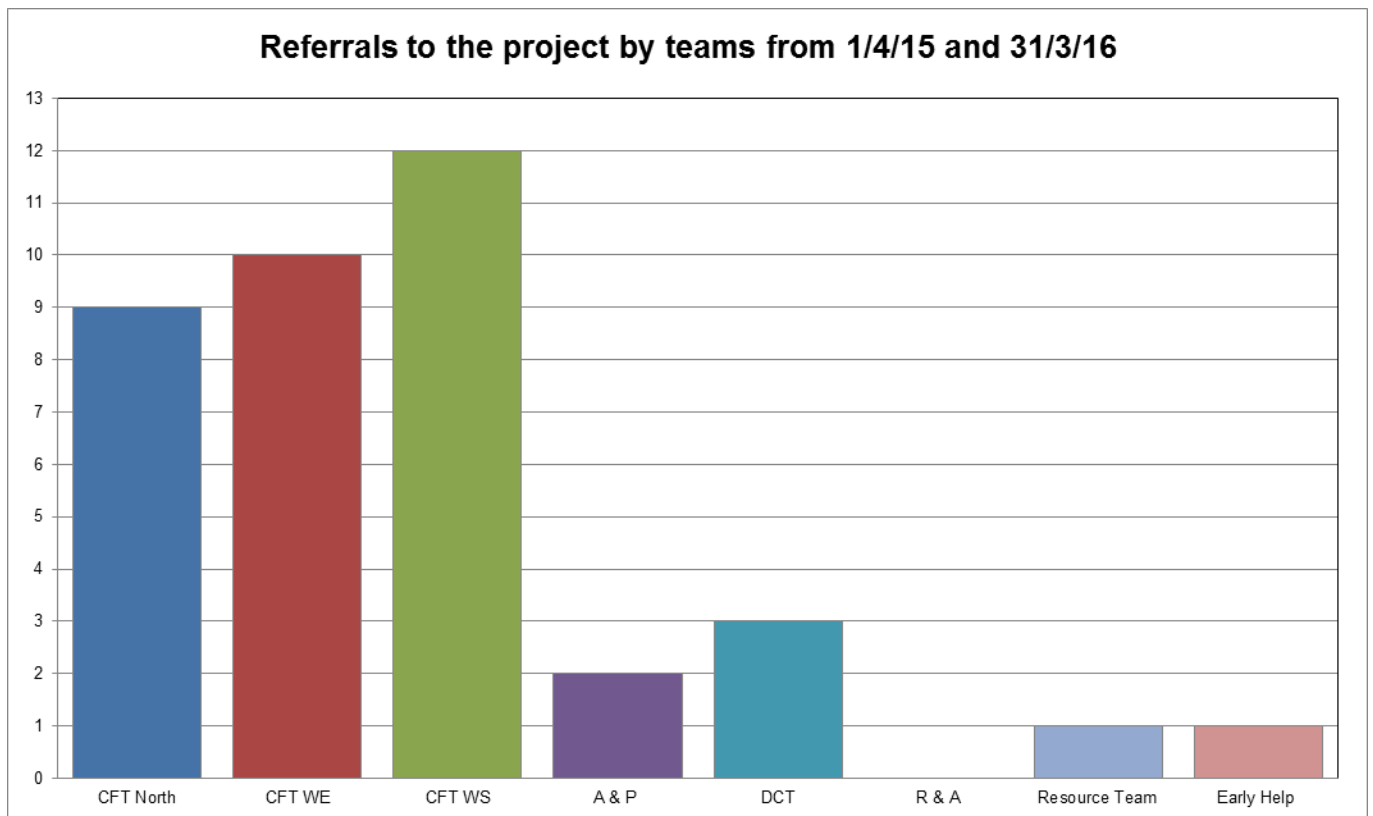
### Current Staff Structure

North Somerset FGC project has remained fairly static since the permanent project co-ordinator left NSC in July 2014. It has a temporary part time project co-ordinator employed for 22.5 hours per week. The project also employs six co-ordinators on casual basis, including two co-ordinators who joined the team in September 2015. Recruitment has largely been on hold during the scoping and tendering process due to the uncertainty of future arrangements.

### Source of FGC Referrals

Between 1/4/15 and 31/3/16 there were 38 referrals to the project. 37 of these coming from social workers within the authority, and one Early Help case from another professional which was deemed exceptional for a FGC.

The project only accepts FGC referrals where cases are open to Social Care, although many other FGC projects have a much wider brief including Youth Justice, Early Help, Troubled Families and education-related cases.



## Referrals progressing to FGC

As at 1/4/2016, of the 38 referrals, 21 had resulted in an FGC, 9 did not proceed and 8 were ongoing. Of the cases that did not proceed to FGC, 4 referrals were withdrawn by the social worker, 4 families failed to engage with the FGC process and 1 referral was not appropriate for an FGC.

## Time taken from referral to allocation and from allocation to FGC

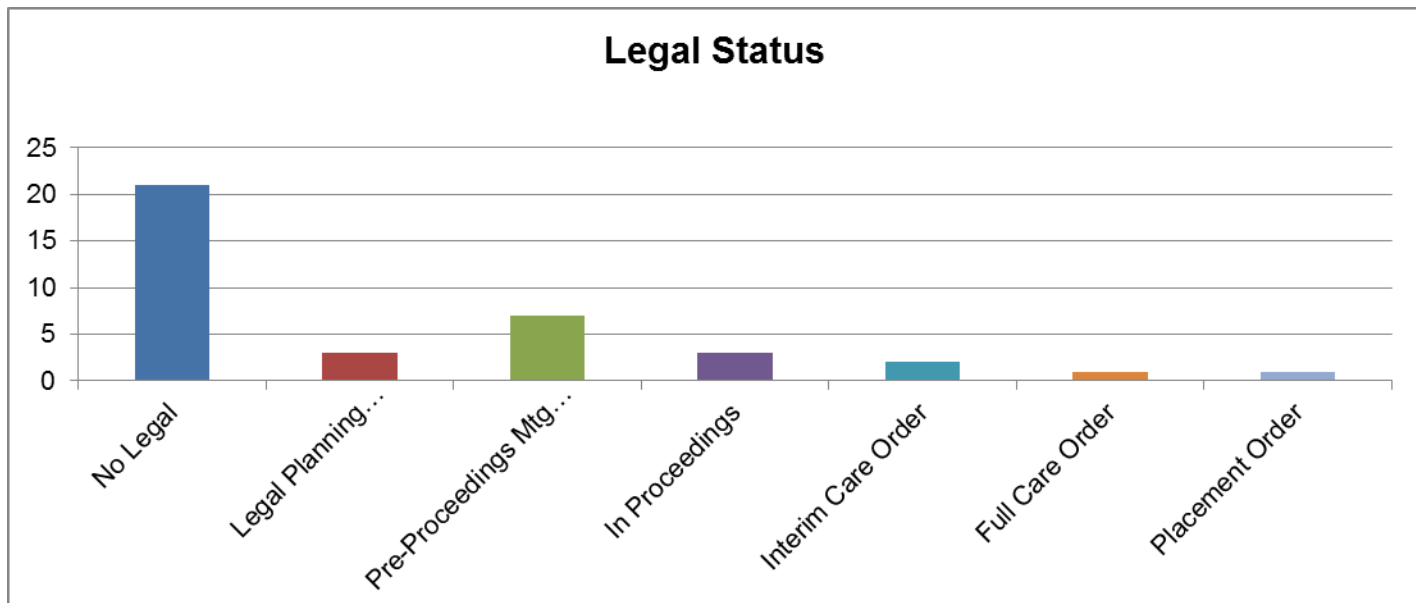
Our target historically was to complete cases from referral to FGC within a period of 4-6 weeks. This has continued to be a challenge for the project during the last two years, mostly due to the limited availability of the pool of casual co-ordinators. Other factors also impact on the time from referral to FGC, such as increased complexity of cases needing more preparation time spent with family members and, in some instances, changes in social workers and children's plans.

For the period 1/4/15 – 31/3/2016:

- The average time taken from referral through to allocation was 10 working days with a range of 0 days to 45 days. Two thirds of the referrals were allocated within 10 working days.
- The average time from allocation through to FGC was 45 working days, with a range of 9 days to 137 days. Three quarters of the FGCs took place within eight weeks of allocation to a co-ordinator.

## Public Law Outline

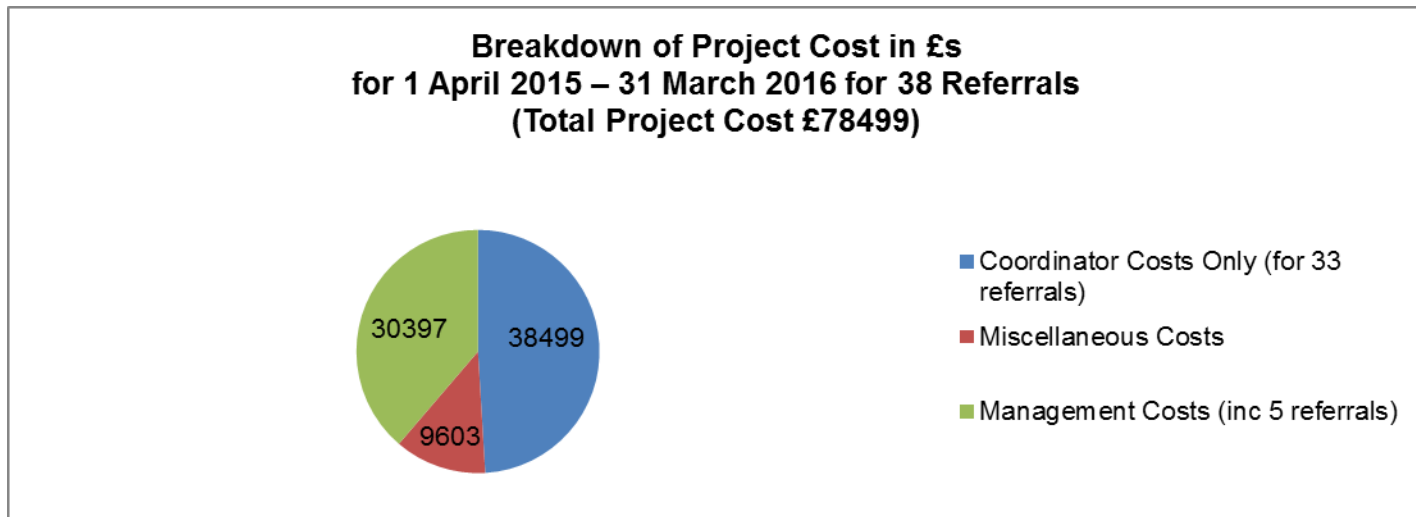
17 of the 38 cases (45%) had some kind of legal status, from Legal Planning Meeting held, through to Full Care Order. Of the 21 cases under 'No Legal', several cases had either previously had some level of legal intervention and/or legal intervention was actively being considered.



## Some stats/facts about our service

- We offer children an advocate depending on their age and understanding and always offer young people an advocate. We use either another FGC co-ordinator or someone from within the network working with the child/young person.
- During this statistical period on average we had 7.4 adult family members at each conference with a range from 3 to 14 family members.
- We always have the referrer at the FGC and will often have representative from other involved agencies, if relevant and with the family's consent. Our average additional agency involvement was 1.6 per FGC.
- All family members including the child; the referrer and any other involved agencies are sent an evaluation form following the FGC.
- We always have written information from the referrer (the agenda) for the family at every FGC. The family is given this information before the FGC. Our service standard is to send this out to families one week before the FGC.
- The family plan is sent to family members and professionals within one week of the FGC.

## Project Cost



The project co-ordinator (manager) co-ordinated five of the 38 FGC referrals during the period 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016, these costs are included under the total management costs (£30397). In addition to the project co-ordinator's 22.5 hrs pw JM2 post, the management costs also include £4343 for Ruth Staples' management oversight of the project - 3 hours per week.

Co-ordinator cost only, per referral, for the remaining 33 referrals, was £1167 per FGC. Co-ordinator costs also include where other co-ordinators have acted as advocates as part of the FGC process. The use of advocacy has increased due in part to the complexity of cases and best practice in respect of gaining the child's voice. Some FGCs have reviews, these have not been counted as separate referrals. Training costs are included in total co-ordinators' costs (£38499) and all co-ordinators now undertake Signs of Safety training in addition to mandatory safeguarding training.



Miscellaneous costs include: FGC refreshments, venue and childcare costs if needed, co-ordinator travel costs, mobile phones and two laptops for new co-ordinators. Total cost per FGC referral including miscellaneous costs (£9603) and management costs was £2066 per FGC.

**Fiona Lightwood, FGC Project Co-ordinator**

**3 May 2016**