



The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith

Minister for Skills

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House of Lords,
London,
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Tuesday 10th June 2025

Dear Peers,

I committed to write to the House setting out the proposed operational details of multi-agency child protection teams, and particularly the role of the Family Help Lead Practitioner alongside the lead practitioner for child protection. This is to respond to concerns of duplication and the impact on the child of their loss of continuity in relationships with the Family Help Lead Practitioner.

New multi-agency child protection teams will be responsible for statutory child protection decisions and oversee child protection activity. But let me be clear, these teams will not be separate from Family Help. It is critical that local safeguarding partners design and deliver multi-agency child protection together as an integrated system within Family Help, where practitioners and teams work alongside each other, wrapping support and expertise around children and their families, to keep children safely at home wherever this is possible.

At the heart of these reforms, is the principle that children and families build a consistent, trusting relationship with a lead practitioner. This is the Family Help Lead Practitioner, and the new integrated system of Family Help and multi-agency child protection means families stay rooted in Family Help and with this practitioner, including where there are child protection concerns. Family Help teams will include highly experienced social workers, including in child protection practice, to ensure that child protection expertise and oversight is embedded in practice across the whole system.

Establishing multi-agency child protection teams will bring a clear, fresh focus to child protection, where experts across agencies work together to identify likely or actual significant harm, share information and take decisive action to protect children. These new teams will support the local authority to discharge its duties under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (duty to investigate).

Family Help Lead Practitioners can be a range of practitioners, including social workers. They will have the knowledge and skills to identify the relevant agencies or practitioners required to meet a family's unique set of needs. They will be alert to all forms of harm and work with multi agency child protection teams and Lead Child Protection Practitioners to respond to them. Lead Child Protection Practitioners will be experienced and skilled social workers, embedded within the multi-agency child protection team but working alongside Family Help Lead Practitioners to keep children safe. Whilst the Family Help Lead Practitioner will be the main point of contact for the family, it is through the team around the family, that families receive the help and support they need, bolstered by advice and expertise from the multi-agency child protection team when there are actual or likely significant harm concerns.

Lead Child Protection Practitioners in multi-agency child protection teams will be responsible for statutory child protection decisions drawing on the expertise and knowledge of the wider multi-agency team. Family Help Lead Practitioners will be crucial in making sure that the day-to-day life and experiences of the child and family are really understood, and child protection decisions centre this information. The multi-agency team will work closely alongside Family Help Lead Practitioners throughout child protection activity, including implementing child protection plans and providing support and oversight.

The functions of the multi-agency child protection team will likely include:

- leading section 47 enquiries;
- gathering information about whether a child is suffering significant harm, to support decision making;
- chairing strategy meetings and child protection conferences;
- overseeing the development, review and closure of child protection plans; and
- providing advice and consultation for practitioners who need multi-agency child protection expertise.

The full details of these functions will be set out in regulations and statutory guidance following consultation and parliamentary scrutiny.

During the committee, noble Lords raised questions about the way these lead practitioner roles work alongside each other in the best interests of children and families and whether there is the potential for duplication. It is important to reflect on the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care which identified that families want a trusted and consistent relationship with a single practitioner when receiving support and services from Children's Social Care and that this must be balanced with a clear, expert and fresh perspective when there are child protection concerns.

The reformed system will enable these lead practitioners to work side by side with the support of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams in the best interests of every child. Opportunities to share information and draw on a range of expertise will mean that decisions that protect children are co-ordinated, evidence-based and timely.

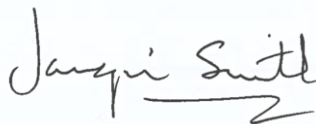
I want also to note that whilst the reform broadens the range of practitioners who will work with families in Family Help, we are clear that it will remain critical to have experienced social workers to take on the role of the Family Help Lead Practitioner for children in need where needs are particularly complex and for children subject to a s47 enquiry or child protection plan. The Family Help Lead Practitioner must be a social worker where a Child Protection plan is in place. Family Help Lead Practitioners will carry out or coordinate all or most of the direct work with the family including where the multi-agency child protection team is involved. It is true that for some cases, this will mean that the lead practitioner will change for a child who moves onto a child protection plan where the lead practitioner is not already a social worker.

We have been clear that safeguarding partners should consider how to keep changes of Family Help Lead Practitioners to a minimum and reduce the impact where a change is required. For example, where resources allow, consideration could be given to whether the previous Family Help Lead Practitioner could continue to work with the family as part of the team around the family, enabling a consistent relationship to continue.

As suggested during the debate, I am taking the opportunity to talk to the Directors of Children's Services to hear their perspectives on the development of this model.

I attach annex A below to illustrate how Family Help and multi-agency child protection will operate. Thank you again for taking the time to engage on these matters. I hope these further details have been useful and I will place a copy in the House libraries.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Jacqui Smith' with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith

Minister for Skills

Annex A

The Families First Partnership Programme takes a whole-system approach to rebalancing children's social care toward earlier intervention – strengthening multi-agency child protection is central



Locally designed systems that meet the needs of the population with effective, integrated and joined up services with partners

