
Families First Quality Award for Family Information Services





FOREWARD

Niall McVicar

Chair, National Association of Family Information Services

Information is a key tool for parents and carers, providing options and possibilities that might otherwise remain unknown and therefore inaccessible. High quality information services that reach out to parents and carers are key to making these possibilities a reality.

The National Association of Family Information Services (NAFIS) has developed the Families First Quality Award to enable local authorities (LA) to provide high quality information services that exceed the Information Duty of the Childcare Act 2006, Section 12 (England), Section 27 (Wales).

It will also help local authorities to meet the Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) code of practice 2014 for those authorities wishing to complete the relevant standards.

The Families First Quality Award provides a development framework for all local authorities, at any stage of the developmental journey, to improve upon their delivery of information to parents and families. The scheme can also support those authorities facing particular challenges complying with the Information Duty.

All local authorities should strategically develop their Family Information Service, monitoring how they use their resources most effectively to deliver the range of services required. The Family and Childcare Trust and NAFIS hope all local authorities will make full use of opportunities, such as that provided by the Families First scheme, to improve the quality of those services. We continue to develop a range of services to support LA information services participating in the scheme.

NAFIS gratefully acknowledges the time and commitment of those organisations that have contributed their expertise to the development of the standards, including a wide range of stakeholders from the statutory and voluntary sectors.

The Family and Childcare Trust would like to thank Suffolk County Council for their support in developing these Standards.

Table of Contents

About the Families First Quality Award	5
Information, Advice & Assistance (IAA) in Local Authorities	6
What is IAA?	6
Why is good quality IAA important?	7
Development of the Families First Standards	7
How to sign up	7
The assessment process	8
Exclusions	10
Getting started	11
Next steps	11
Glossary	11
 SECTION ONE: Families First FIS Standards	 13
STANDARD 1 – Helping families	13
STANDARD 2 – Enabling families	14
STANDARD 3 – Supporting vulnerable families	15
STANDARD 4 – Including families	16
STANDARD 5 – Meeting statutory requirements	17
STANDARD 6 – Staff training and development	18
STANDARD 7 – Leadership and management	19
STANDARD 8 – Quality information	20
STANDARD 9 – Extra help for families (brokerage)	22
STANDARD 10 – Welsh Language (Welsh FIS only)	23
STANDARD 11 – Collaborative working	25
STANDARD 12 – Access to early education	26

SECTION TWO: Families First SEND Standards	27
SEND STANDARD 1 – Information Advice and Assistance	28
SEND STANDARD 2 – Improving Provision	30
SEND STANDARD 3 – The Local Offer	32
SEND STANDARD 4 – Personal Budgets	35
SEND STANDARD 5 – Collaborative Working	36
 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION	 37

Throughout this document you will find references to supporting documents, a list of which is included at Annex 1.

INTRODUCTION

About the Families First Quality Award

The Families First Quality Award recognises Family Information Services that demonstrate excellence in providing information, advice and assistance to local families.

Achievement of the award recognises Family Information Services that exceed the requirements set out in the Childcare Act 2006 and provide information and assistance of the highest quality. The standards have been designed so that local commissioning or organisational requirements can easily be included into the existing Family First framework.

The award is a competence-based assessment similar to that of an NVQ. Assessments are carried out by accredited Families First Assessors who will work with Local Authorities (LAs) and Family Information Services to identify suitable examples of evidence that demonstrate competence against the individual elements of the standards.

Undergoing the award works as a quality improvement tool; in order to achieve accreditation participants are supported to develop any areas that need enhancing.

The standards provide a quality framework to help Local Authority information services to think about the Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) they provide, with the emphasis on delivering a high-quality experience for the service user. The aim is to ensure that, while an organisation reaps the rewards of the Families First Standards journey, they never lose sight of the needs and well-being of the individuals they seek to support.

The Family First Standards enable staff and advisory boards to fulfil these requirements through a quality improvement process, supported by a qualified and occupationally competent Family First Assessor.

The award is verified by qualified and occupationally competent Family First Internal Verifiers. The award is standardised nationally in accordance with the NAFIS Family First internal verification strategy, which is overseen by the NAFIS Advisory Board.

Information, Advice & Assistance (IAA) in Local Authorities

Section 12 (England)/ Section 27 (Wales) of The Childcare Act 2006 (hereafter referred to as the "Information Duty") establishes a duty on local authorities to establish and maintain a service providing information, advice and assistance to parents or prospective parents related to the provision of childcare and any other related services and facilities in the area of their local authority that may benefit families. In addition, the Act prescribes that information must have regard to the needs of parents of disabled children or young persons and the provision of childcare and other related services. The service must also be established and maintained in the manner, which is best calculated to facilitate access to the service by people in the local authority's area who might otherwise have difficulty in taking advantage of the service.

For the purposes of this document the acronym 'FIS' will be used to refer to Family Information Services in England and Wales.

What is Information, Advice and Assistance?

Providing information, advice and assistance (IAA) is the core function of FIS. It covers a range of activities that equip parents, prospective parents and family members with what they need to make informed choices about the care, health, education and recreation of their children, including those with specific requirements.

IAA can be defined as covering:

- **information** – accurate, up-to-date and objective information about childcare, health, recreation and learning opportunities, progression routes, choices, funding and where to find help and advice and how to access this
- **advice** – activities that help parents, prospective parents and family members to gather, understand and interpret information and apply it to their own situation
- **assistance** – provision of an impartial signposting, brokerage and referral service to specialist support to help parents, prospective parents and family members to meet their information needs and make progress

Why is good quality IAA important?

Good quality IAA supports parents, prospective parents and family members to make informed decisions about childcare and other services that they may want or need to access. By providing IAA, FIS help practitioners support parents and help their children to achieve the Every Child Matters outcomes: to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well being.

It is recognised that IAA is delivered in different ways and we want to involve a range of services, including those commissioned by local authorities, in the establishment and use of the Families First Standards.

Development of the Families First Standards

The Department for Education (DfE) originally commissioned NAFIS to develop and publish a set of National Quality Standards for LA information services in England to help them meet their statutory information duties under the Childcare Act (Section 12) and deliver a high quality information service.

The Welsh Assembly also acknowledged the importance of the Information Duty as part of its own Childcare Act and has supported NAFIS as it works with the 22 FIS in Wales to ensure that the standards facilitate a dual assessment role against the requirements of Section 27 (the 'Information Duty') of the Childcare Act for Wales.

In 2014, the Family and Childcare Trust (the charity which hosts NAFIS) developed The Families First SEND Framework for Family Information Services as part of the Making it Personal (MiP 2) project which was funded by the DfE to support the implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice (DfE 2014). This forms section two of this standards document, the Families First SEND Standards.

How to sign up

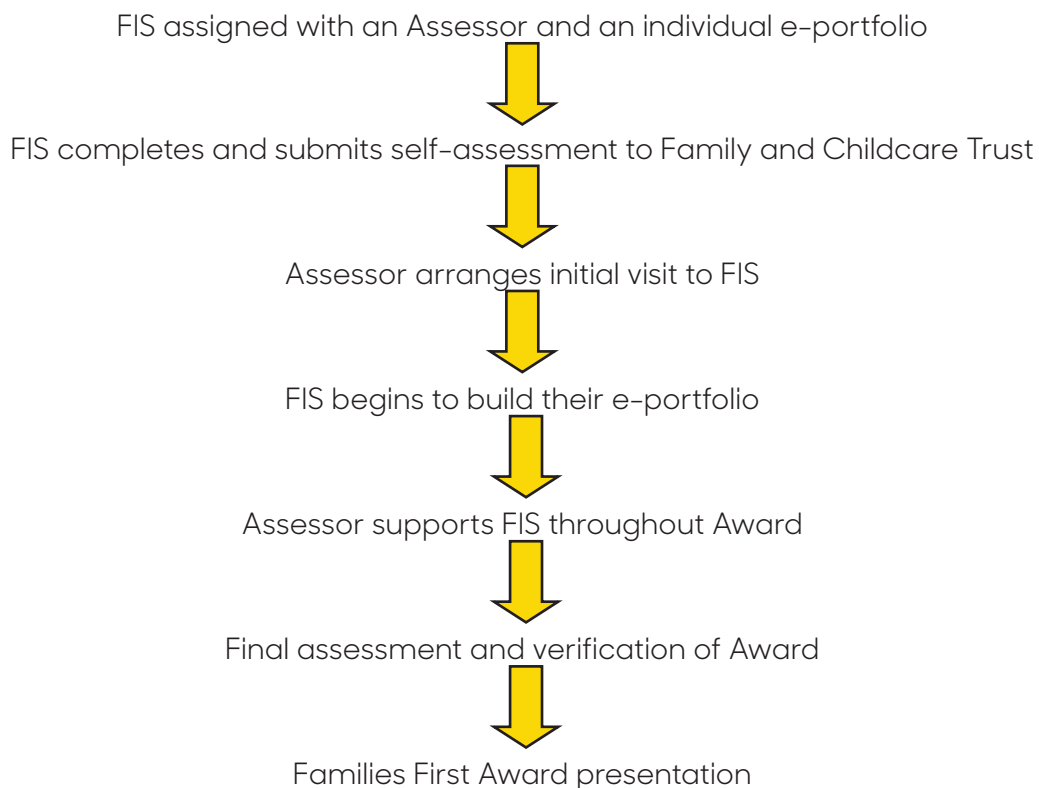
Commissioner or lead submits an expression of interest to Family and Childcare Trust by completing expression of interest form at www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/families-first-quality-award. We'll reply with a guidance document.

The local authority lead completes the requirements section in the Guidance Document and submits to Family and Childcare Trust. Family and Childcare Trust will agree an action plan with the lead based on the requirements and issue an invoice.

The Assessment Process

When you have signed up to the Families First Award you will follow the assessment process outlined below, with the support of your Assessor. Your submitted assessment will go through an internal and external verification process. Please contact us if you require any further information about the assessment process or how to sign up.

Figure 1.1 Families First Assessment Process



Assessors

The Families First Assessor will be your guide and main point of contact through the award. They will contact you from the start as well as guide you through the e-portfolio, schedule the initial visit as well as conduct the midterm review. They will also sign off on the award at the final visit and negotiate a timescale that is mutually acceptable. Your assessor will help you plan what you want to get from the award including an improvement plan. All of the assessors are based in the regions and have lots of experience both with local authorities and the award so they are likely to be local to you.

Internal Verification

Assessors are also internal verifiers for the other regions. Upon sign off from your assessor, the internal verifier steps in to make sure the assessor has adequately assessed the evidence and provide a report to NAFIS for the final checking stage prior to accreditation.

External Verification

The final stage of the process is external verification where the assessor and internal verifier work is checked before the final award is given. The external verification group will be steering group colleagues or FCT staff to ensure that the award is of the highest standard and meets the needs of clients.

Timeframe

The recommended completion time is 3 to 6 months and there is flexibility of start dates to suit you and your team. Once you begin you are required to complete your award within 12 months, unless there are special circumstances.

Using the Families First Standards

As an organisation looks at the criteria explained on the following pages, they need to ask themselves, if an assessor is visiting our organisation for the first time:

- what would they need to see, hear or experience to demonstrate that the criteria are being met?
- how can we evidence it?

Establishing the starting point is an essential first step in using the standards to drive continuous improvement. LA information services are set up in different ways and have different resources available to them. An information service may sit outside the local authority (for example, a commissioned Third Sector organisation). When an organisation goes for assessment against these standards the assessor will accommodate these differences and assess an organisation accordingly.

Self Assessment Tool

A self assessment tool is available to help a LA decide whether they are ready to go for assessment. Organisations can use this independently or with partners. It will also help identify areas for further development as well as providing an initial overview of the service to the assessor.

Exclusions

When a LA information service applies for assessment against the Families First standards ALL LA information services must complete Standards 1–8 and Standard 11–12 in Section One. In addition:

1. LA information services in Wales must evidence Standard 10
2. LA information services in England must evidence Standard 9
3. Elements of Standard 8 relate to the Family Information Directory. LA information services in Wales are exempt from these elements.

AREA WITHIN THE CHILDCARE ACT 2006 (section 12 in England and section 27 in Wales)	FAMILIES FIRST STANDARD(S)		
		England	Wales
Provision of childcare information	Standard 1 & 2	✓	✓
Access to the information service	Standard 3 & 4	✓	✓
Information about other services, facilities and publications	All Standards	✓	✓
Information on services for disabled children, for children with additional needs and for disabled parents	All Standards	✓	✓
Brokerage, advice and assistance	Standard 9	✓	✗
Safeguarding children	All Standards	✓	✓
Quality of service delivery	All Standards	✓	✓
Information management	Standard 8	✓	partial*
Welsh Language	Standard 10	✗	✓
Collaborative working	Standard 11	✓	✓
Early education	Standard 12	✓	✓

*Elements of Standard 8 relate to the Family Information Directory. LA information services in Wales are exempt from these elements.

Families First SEND Standards

Section Two the Families First SEND Standards are optional for any LA information service in England and will help the authority to meet the SEND Code of Practice (2014). There is an additional cost for completing these standards, an LA information service can choose to do the SEND Standards at the same time as the FIS Standards, or at a later date if they wish.

Getting started

1. Review the standards and consider what evidence may already exist that demonstrates the standards are being met. Evidence may include: management information, including needs assessments; self-evaluation and assessment forms and reports; external reports on the quality, coverage and impact of local services on outcomes for parents, prospective parents and families (for example, from inspections and assessments). To assist in this task a Self-Assessment Workbook will be provided.

Next steps

2. Having considered current evidence and identified areas for development, plan how these will be taken forward. Establish priorities and agree objectives and targets with staff and partners. Decide what needs to be done, who will do it and by when.
3. Monitor the tasks to make sure they progress; identify any issues or risks at an early stage and make sure these are addressed as they arise
4. Feed the outcomes and any feedback into the next review and planning cycle.

GLOSSARY

Brokerage Service is typically provided via a LA FIS and is a Duty in the Childcare Act 2006. The service must provide further assistance to parents who have had particular difficulties finding childcare that readily meets their needs. Brokering involves helping the family by acting as an intermediary when, for any reason, a family might find it difficult to access the service themselves.

Clients are defined throughout as parents (mothers and fathers), prospective parents, family members and grandparents, children or young people. It includes anyone who is acting on behalf of the client (for example, another practitioner) or local authority that is looking to access information on provision outside of their geographical boundary.

Enhanced Childcare Database a database (usually maintained by FIS) containing all Ofsted registered childcare providers and childminders, with additional information added by the providers themselves (such as opening hours and fees). Information in the directory usually covers the LA's geographical area and is accessible via the Internet and by phoning a FIS helpline. Not all childcare providers choose to have their details published on the Internet.

Family Services Directory a database (usually maintained by a LA and often by a FIS) containing a range of services for parents, children and young people that have been added by a LA or by the organisations running the services. Information in the directory usually covers the LA's geographical area and is accessible via the Internet and by phoning a FIS helpline. The directory may be advertised using a particular title or brand that has been determined by the LA.

Parents are defined in the Childcare Act 2006 as a parent of a young child, and includes any individual who:

- (a) has parental responsibility for a young child, or
- (b) has care of a young child

Prospective parents are defined in the Childcare Act 2006 as a pregnant woman or any other person who is likely to become, or is planning to become, a parent.

Transition is used to describe the natural progression of a child or young person through a number of stages as they grow and develop. Often, they will also be expected to cope with changes such as movement from an early years setting to primary, from primary to secondary school and for children with disabilities or chronic ill health, from children's to adult services.

Section ONE

Families First FIS Standards

STANDARD 1 – Helping families

Families know how LA information services can help them

- 1.1 Families will have knowledge of:
 - (a) the service that they can expect from the LA information service,
 - (b) their own responsibilities in relation to the use of the service,
 - (c) where they can go to for help if they are not getting the service that they can reasonably expect.
- 1.2 The benefits of the LA information services are promoted to all potential clients.
- 1.3 Up to date information about where and how to access the LA information services is available in a range of suitable formats, settings and media channels used by potential clients.
- 1.4 Families can access an extended range of IAA services delivered in a variety of outreach formats.
- 1.5 Families are aware of and know how to access appropriate local and national information and services.

STANDARD 2 –Enabling families**Families are supported to make informed and realistic decisions about services**

- 2.1 High quality, up to date and impartial information about a range of services and organisations is provided to families, taking into consideration any statutory requirements for providing such information. (For an overview of what can be included see Annex 2)
- 2.2 The service must provide families with the categories of information prescribed in the regulations about registered childcare published by Ofsted (England) or CSSIW (Wales).
- 2.3 Information services must provide families with the categories of information prescribed in the regulations about non-registered childcare where they are able to obtain the information.
- 2.4 Information is provided in a range of formats reflecting the different ages, needs and capabilities of families.
- 2.5 Information is provided at a range of delivery points reflecting the different ages, needs and capabilities of clients.
- 2.6 The service helps families get the information they need about childcare provision in other areas without having to make contact with neighbouring authorities.
- 2.7 Families and the professionals supporting them (for example, social workers, health workers, children's centre staff acting on behalf of a parent) views on the adequacy of information supplied are sought and acted upon.
- 2.8 Families are appropriately signposted or referred to other specialised services for further support and information.
- 2.9 An immediate referral for specialist assessment and support is undertaken where the information service has reason to believe a client or child is at risk from harm.
- 2.10 Referrals to specialist services and/or multi-agency teams are monitored.

STANDARD 3 – Supporting vulnerable families

Special attention and care is given to identify, help and support vulnerable families to make informed and realistic decisions about services

- 3.1 Communications with families take into account the needs of mothers and fathers, the vulnerable, disadvantaged or excluded.
- 3.2 Communications with families are adapted to reflect different needs. For example, in relation to basic skills needs, impairments, English as second language.
- 3.3 Families are informed about safe practices when accessing services found on the Enhanced Childcare Directory or Family Services Directory and where applicable as part of the Local Offer of services for families with special education needs and disabilities. For example, advice on checking credentials, references, accreditation with awarding bodies or national organisations.
- 3.4 Parents are supported to understand how other specialist services can help their family and how these services are accessed.
- 3.5 Information, advice and assistance services are delivered flexibly at all times, in places and through media channels that are convenient for a range of families.
- 3.6 Information, advice and assistance is impartial and provided confidentially.
Unless a child or young person is perceived to be at risk of significant harm, in which case the local processes for raising such concerns with the relevant agencies will be followed. This would also apply if childcare provision failed to meet legal or quality requirements.

STANDARD 4 – Including families

Information services collect, monitor and review equalities data as well as promote equality of opportunity, celebrate diversity and challenge stereotypes in the delivery of the service.

- 4.1 Information services reach as many potential families in the local community as possible, including disadvantaged and marginalised groups.
- 4.2 Services are sensitive to people's faith, cultural and family background.
- 4.3 Stereotypes are challenged where appropriate.
- 4.4 Active efforts are made to ensure that the information services, workforce and partners reflects the diversity of the wider community.
- 4.5 Services give consideration to clients with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including children and their parents.

STANDARD 5 – Meeting statutory requirements**LA information services fulfil relevant legal duties and support this by implementing robust local policies**

- 5.1 The requirement for the provision of information, advice and assistance services is set out in a written statement that makes clear the need to meet the requirements of the Information Duty and other linked legislation where relevant. For example, the duty to produce and maintain a Local Offer – see Families First SEND Standard 3 in Section Two.
- 5.2 Local partnership agreements, with appropriate services, clearly set out the respective roles and responsibilities of each partner.
- 5.3 LA information services can demonstrate an awareness of relevant guidance and statutory documentation such as those referred to in Annex 1.
- 5.4 LA information services have and implement policies on and these are reviewed regularly with action taken to improve and develop them where appropriate:
 - (a) Promoting equality (including age, gender, disability, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation)
 - (b) Impartiality
 - (c) Assessing and meeting the needs of individuals for information, advice and assistance / support
 - (d) Engaging with mothers and fathers and their families
 - (e) Data protection and data sharing
 - (f) Information management and quality assurance
 - (g) The monitoring and evaluation of information, advice and assistance provision

STANDARD 6 – Staff training and development**Staff providing information, advice and assistance services are appropriately trained and qualified and participate in continuous professional development**

- 6.1 Recruitment policies and practices comply with local and national safeguarding and with equal opportunities best practice standards and legislation.
- 6.2 LA information services have induction, training and development plans for staff providing information, advice and assistance.
- 6.3 Suitable training programmes are developed to suit the range of delivery points and are delivered with suitable frequency.
- 6.4 All staff delivering information, advice and assistance have the skills, knowledge and qualifications* to:
 - (a) deliver a high quality service
 - (b) deliver information, advice and assistance to diverse client groups and challenge stereotyping
 - (c) know where to access specialist advice services from the independent, private and voluntary sectors
 - (d) adhere to their relevant professional codes of conduct
 - (e) have access to a range of continuing professional development opportunities and have structured opportunities for the evaluation of professional practice
- 6.5 Systems are in place to regularly review and assess staff training needs, and these inform training plans and policies
- 6.6 Staff involved in delivering the extra help via a brokerage service will be suitably trained and supported. (See Families First Standard 9 in Section One)
- 6.7 Staff are familiar with and understand relevant legislation that impacts on their work:
 - (a) Sections 12 (England) and Section 27 (Wales) of the Childcare Act 2006
 - (b) Current Ofsted or CSSIW regulation and inspection of childcare

**The minimum recommended level of training for a specialist role such as brokerage would be an NVQ Level 3 in Advice and Guidance or equivalent experience, skills or abilities.*

STANDARD 7 – Leadership and management

Information services are planned, monitored, reviewed and evaluated and prompt actions are taken to improve services and meet families' needs

- 7.1 Systems are in place to enable decisions to be made at a strategic level regarding the planning of services to deliver information, advice and assistance to families.
- 7.2 Information services proactively engage the local community in the design, planning, delivery, quality assurance and evaluation of the service.
- 7.3 The design, planning and delivery of information services takes into account the needs of a varied range of families, clients and professionals in the local community as well as non-users.
- 7.4 The accessibility, use of the information service and effectiveness of provision are monitored, regularly reviewed and evaluated and data is used to inform service improvement plans.
- 7.5 Strategic objectives, priorities, targets and performance indicators for delivery of information, advice and assistance are set. These support the delivery of the relevant Health and Wellbeing Plan, Children & Young People's Plan and other local strategic plans / objectives. These enable services to be evaluated and support improvements where necessary.
- 7.6 Managers of LA information services are aware of the local population (for example, percentage of disabled children and young people) who may wish to access local services and will use this information to inform service delivery. (See Families First Standard 7.2 above)
- 7.7 The effectiveness of referral systems is reviewed at least quarterly with providers of specialist services and action is taken to rectify areas for development.
- 7.8 The development of information services is informed by regular (at least annual) feedback from:
 - (a) early years and childcare providers
 - (b) referral agencies
 - (c) key partners
 - (d) families
 - (e) action taken in response to feedback is communicated back to these groups.
- 7.9 LA information services have up to date improvement plans, which are reviewed and evaluated.

Standard 8 – Quality information (Wales exempt)**Information is effectively managed and quality assured**

- 8.1 LA information services maintain details of childcare providers ('Enhanced Childcare Directory' or 'ECD' information) and records of provision of services or facilities, which may be of benefit to parents, prospective parents, children or young people (Family Service Directory 'FSD' information).
- 8.2 LA information services will be proactive in identifying and engaging with potential sources of ECD and FSD information.
- 8.3 LA information services gain the consent of providers for the information included in ECD and FSD records and how it is displayed or used.
- 8.4 LA information services have systems in place to encourage all service providers to regularly update the information held in a Family Service Directory.
- 8.5 The service is proactive in gathering ECD and FSD service records from identified sources of information. This may be a technical solution where service providers are automatically prompted via email to update their own records routinely. For example allowing the review and update each ECD record at least once every 4 months and each FSD record at least once every 6 months.
- 8.6 LA information services enhance information provided by Ofsted about childcare providers to create its ECD, giving particular consideration to:
 - (a) opening hours
 - (b) cost
 - (c) vacancies
 - (d) age ranges
 - (e) Ofsted outcome, latest inspection date and ideally link to latest report
 - (f) information to help parents/carers of children and young people with SEND make informed choices) (See Families First SEND Standard 4 in Section Two)
- 8.7 Appropriate vocabularies and tagging will be adopted for ECD and FSD records. These will preferably be those recommended for use for the Family Information Directory.
- 8.8 LA information services implement appropriate data quality standards and assurance procedures.
- 8.9 LA information services provide online access to its ECD and FSD records.

- 8.10 LA information services provide information about services and facilities in other local authority areas. For example this may be achieved by working collaboratively with other local authorities/organisations, using technology to “harvest” data from other websites or embedding widgets into its website.
- 8.11 The Family Service Directory is set up in a way that allows it to be regularly reviewed and analysed (for example to identify weaknesses and gaps in local provision) and used to inform local strategic planning and commissioning of services. (See also Families First Standard 4 in Section Two)
- 8.12 Information gathered from local childcare providers and associated services will inform local childcare sufficiency assessment and planning.

STANDARD 9 – Extra help for families (brokerage)

LA information services encourage and guide families through the information available and provides extra help and support those who may otherwise not access services on their own (hereafter referred to as a 'brokerage service')

- 9.1 Staff understand the meaning of a 'Brokerage Service' as well as their role in its delivery.
- 9.2 Systems and procedures are in place to support families through the brokerage service.
- 9.3 Staff are aware of the various factors, which may lead to the brokerage service being used and plan services accordingly.
- 9.4 Staff communicate the importance of the brokerage service to strategic decision makers.
- 9.5 Families facing barriers to accessing services are given the assistance that they need to help them overcome these barriers.
- 9.6 The brokerage service is effectively promoted to families. For example via outreach events, at children's centres, jobcentres and other venues and locations that are attended by children, young people and parents/carers.
- 9.7 Differentiated levels of brokerage will be identified for supporting locally agreed prioritised families. For example, families suffering financial hardship, children in need (known to children's social care), those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), Looked After Children and those who have recently been adopted.
- 9.8 LA information services establish effective partnerships with services that may help improve the delivery of the service. For example health, social care, children's centres, Parent Partnership Service.
- 9.9 Systems exist for the brokerage service to feedback information about 'gaps' in service provision in their area to inform local delivery planning.
- 9.10 Referrals (outgoing and incoming) are effectively recorded and used to inform local delivery planning.

STANDARD 10 – Welsh Language (Welsh FIS only)**LA information services encourage and promote the use of the Welsh Language**

- 10.1 LA information services have effective partnership arrangements in place to ensure that Welsh medium and bilingual childcare provision is developed in accordance with identified needs.
- 10.2 LA information services support the Children and Young People's Partnership and/or Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) to raise awareness of Welsh language issues and ensure that there is sufficient consideration at all levels where decisions are made about Welsh medium and bilingual childcare provision funding.
- 10.3 LA information services have established baselines and annually monitor progress in the provision of Welsh language and bilingual childcare settings, in all childcare sectors in accordance with the relevant statutory regulations and any associated guidance.
- 10.4 LA information services provide information to families about the advantages of raising children bilingually and using Welsh in the family home, how to access Welsh medium literature, publications and availability of Welsh language classes.
- 10.5 LA information services make parents aware of the initiatives to support them in raising their children bilingually and using Welsh in the family home.
- 10.6 All promotional and other materials (written, web based) produced by LA information services will be available bilingually in accordance with the Welsh Language Act.
- 10.7 When new policies and initiatives are being formulated the linguistic consequences are assessed.
- 10.8 There is a commitment to delivering an equally high quality service in both the English and Welsh language.
- 10.9 Families receive communications in the language of their choice (English or Welsh).
- 10.10 Arrangements will be made for a Welsh speaker to be available where families wish to communicate in this language.

- 10.11 Information will be provided to families, which clearly specifies if a childcare provider operates in a:
- (a) Welsh medium setting
 - (b) Welsh medium and English medium setting
 - (c) bilingual setting
 - (d) predominantly English medium setting with some use of Welsh
 - (e) English medium setting
- 10.12 All signage in offices or for events will be bilingual with Welsh given equal prominence to English.

STANDARD 11 – Collaborative working

Collaborative, partnership, procurement and resourcing arrangements for the delivery of information advice and assistance improves support to families

(See also Families First SEND Standard 5 in Section Two)

- 11.1 Any partnership arrangements formulated locally for the delivery of information, advice and assistance services are informed by:
 - (a) an assessment of the numbers, profile and needs of clients and potential clients locally
 - (b) consultations with clients, potential clients, service providers and other external agencies as appropriate
 - (c) systematic arrangements for identifying gaps and shortcomings in existing information, advice and assistance provision.
- 11.2 The procurement and contracting of information, advice and assistance services (for example, if an LA outsources part or all of its LA information service) are open and transparent and conducted in line with relevant EU and UK law, regulations, guidance and good practice.
- 11.3 Any partnership arrangements formulated locally for the delivery of information, advice and assistance services take into account performance against these quality standards and other relevant frameworks and implementation guidelines.
- 11.4 The LA information service will look to secure appropriate resourcing to effectively support its partners.
- 11.5 Multi-agency working and collaboration is underpinned by joint working when appropriate.
- 11.6 The service shares good practice with other FIS, local authorities, information services, partner agencies and with national bodies (as appropriate).

STANDARD 12 – Access to early education

LA information services support parents / carers to access early education for their children

- 12.1 LA information services publish clear and transparent information about how parents / carers can access their free entitlement to grant funded early education. In England this would include all eligible children aged 2, 3 and 4 years and in Wales all eligible 3 and 4 year olds.
- 12.2 LA information services enable children to access to their full entitlement to grant funded early education. (If provided directly by the school where they have space and where this is the parents' preference).
- 12.3 LA information services help families to understand that they can access their entitlement free at the point of delivery, without applying additional charges, top up fees or terms and conditions of access.
- 12.4 LA information services have effective mechanisms in place for recording where families report to them that they have been unable to access their free entitlement, where:
 - (a) a provider may be charging them inappropriately
 - (b) a provider is charging extra, where the child has SEND
 - (d) a provider is rationing places for any reason
 - (c) the provider or parent/carer reports insufficient early education places for the parent to access the entitlement

LA information services ensure these situations can be challenged and rectified, either directly or by passing this information to the appropriate team.
- 12.5 LA information services understand the impact of poverty on children's learning and development and takes measures to ensure children, especially from financially hard pressed families, take advantage of their full entitlement: 15 hours in England or 10 hours in Wales. For example, by promoting the free entitlement in marketing materials and on the website, through the brokerage service. (See also Families First Standard 9 in Section One).
- 12.6 LA information services are aware that children from multiply-disadvantaged backgrounds have the most to benefit from access to high quality early education and care, and take measures to ensure these children participate by making use of their full entitlement, wherever practical.

Section TWO

Families First SEND Standards

The Families First SEND Standards for Family Information Services (FIS) is an outcome based framework, which will be familiar to many local authorities who have completed the Families First Standards. This framework was originally developed in order to support local authorities to make use of the resources and infrastructure that exists typically within local authority FIS in order to help meet the requirements of the SEND Code of Practice.

Any local authority information service can use these standards to help improve the quality of services and focus on the needs of families with children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The Families First SEND Standards are optional for any LA information service in England and will help the authority to meet the SEND Code of Practice (2014). There is an additional cost for completing these standards. An LA information service can choose to do the SEND Standards at the same time as the FIS Standards, or at a later date if they wish.

Please contact the Family and Childcare Trust if you would like to be accredited under the SEND Families First Framework. Ideally the organisation should already have been awarded or be working towards the Families First Quality Award.



SEND STANDARD 1: Information Advice and Assistance (SEND Code of Practice section 2)
LA information services provides appropriate information, advice and assistance to parents/ carers of children and young people with SEND

- 1.1 Staff provide information, advice and support that covers SEND, health and social care for young people (aged 0–25) and their parents, either directly or by signposting to the relevant service or organisation. *Code of Practice section 2 – Impartial information, advice and support.*
- 1.2 Staff provide impartial information, advice and assistance that is confidential, impartial and free at the point of delivery. *Code of Practice section 2 and Duty 12 guidance.*
- 1.3a Staff understand their responsibilities and remit (as defined locally) in helping to deliver the requirements of the SEND Code of Practice:
- 1.3b LA information services understand their role in improving provision for families with children and young people with SEND;
- 1.3c LA information services are clear about what level of information, advice and assistance it can provide to families of children with SEND and when to refer the family to another service, department or organisation. (Ideally robust arrangements are in place to enable basic information about the family to be captured at the first point of enquiry and passed on with the referral).
- 1.4 Service staff put measures in place to make sure information is easy for children, young people and their parents to understand and use plain English language and clear images, rather than professional jargon. *Code of Practice section 2.6 – Involving families in decision making.*
- 1.5 LA information services involve young people with SEND in preparing and reviewing the Local Offer either directly, or via the responsible service or organisation. For example, the FIS may work with or hold a formal agreement with its local Parent Partnership Service, SEND or Youth Service defining how the Local Offer will be reviewed and the various roles and responsibilities each service has and the contribution it can make.
- 1.6 LA information services deliver information, advice and assistance in a manner that promotes independence, choice and control for families recognising that:
 - (a) in most cases, parents/carers will know their child or young person best;
 - (b) some 18–25 year olds receiving support will be living independently of their families or the care of their local authority;
 - (c) VCS services, volunteers and the wider community should be valued in supporting families; and
 - (d) helping families to make informed choices and define outcomes for their child or young person, is empowering and promotes independence from the local authority.

- 1.7 LA information services provide families of children and young people, with platforms to feedback about services and their experiences, these may include:
- (a) Ensuring that the feedback area of the Local Offer is clearly explained, easily accessible to families and they are aware of how their feedback will be responded to.
 - (b) Directly providing internet forums and social media sites where families can discuss issues and share information and where the FIS can publish useful information.
 - (c) Signposting to internet forums, social media sites provided by the relevant service or organisation (for example Parent Partnership Service, local charities supporting children and young people with SEND, and the local authority youth website).
 - (d) Providing relevant publications or links to publications that would assist families of children and young people with SEND.
 - (e) Inviting family members to be on virtual advisory groups or forums or to be part of a FIS parents' forum. (See also Families First SEND Standard 5.6 in Section Two)
- 1.8 The information service helps families with children and young people with an Education, Health and Care plan, to express a preference for state academies, free schools and further education colleges – currently limited to maintained mainstream and special schools – either directly or by signposting to the relevant service. *Code of Practice 9.78.*

SEND STANDARD 2: Improving Provision (SEND Code of Practice section 5, 6 & 7)**LA information services contribute to increasing options and improving provision for families with children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND**

- 2.1 LA information services enable early years and childcare providers to improve their information in a manner that would assist families with children and young people with SEND, to make informed choices about early education, schools and childcare, for example:
- Proactively collecting and storing information about setting SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Coordinators)
 - Proactively collecting and storing information about relevant training undertaken by staff and relevant experience of working with and including, children with SEND in the Enhanced Childcare Directory.
 - Supporting early years settings and schools to ensure their information is updated within the Local Offer.
- 2.2 LA information services have arrangements in place to offer additional assistance for families with children and young people with SEND, who would otherwise have difficulty accessing an early years, childcare or out of school place – otherwise known as a brokerage service; See Families First Standard 9 in Section One.
- 2.3 LA information services are able to capture feedback from families and colleagues where early years and childcare providers are not meeting the needs of children with SEND, or have refused them entry so that the provider can be challenged either directly by the FIS and/or by the appropriate service or organisation.
- 2.4 LA information services ensure (through policies and practice) that all families are treated with dignity and respect and that particular sensitivities around children and young people with SEND are considered and implemented.
- 2.5a LA information services benefit from feedback and involvement of children, young people with SEND and their parents/carers. For example, by directly consulting with target groups, having robust arrangements in place to share the views collected by the responsible service or department, seeking their views via facilities made available on the internet or within the Family Service Directory itself;
- 2.5b LA information services should use this feedback to improve its services for this group. *Code of Practice section 2.6 Involving families in decision making;*
- 2.5c LA information services should swiftly pass any feedback it receives from members of the public about another service so that compliments and complaints can be managed effectively;

- 2.5d LA information services should pass information about any potential gaps in service provision that are identified by members of the public, to the relevant service or department;
- 2.5e LA information services should know how to pass on feedback about any potential problems or gaps in service provision it has identified with relevant public health colleagues / commissioners and / or Clinical Commissioning Groups.
- 2.6 All staff are trained and are knowledgeable about meeting the needs of families with children with SEND within the scope of their role. For example, all staff will have a good awareness of the SEND Code of Practice and understand how to provide information, advice and assistance to families. There may be particular FIS staff members such as brokerage or outreach officers who take a specialist lead role in supporting families of children with SEND.
- 2.7a LA information services provide all parents, children and young people with clear and accurate impartial information, advice and guidance in relation to SEND; the level of information, advice and assistance will depend on the FIS local remit in delivering the requirements of the Code of Practice.
- 2.7b LA information services provide general information, advice and guidance for families with children and young people with SEND.
- 2.7c LA information services provide specific information about the support that is available to individuals as part of the provision of a coordinated assessment and planning process.
- 2.7d LA information services provide specific information in relation to early years and childcare services, children's centres and support for children with SEND that is within the FIS' existing remit.
- 2.7e LA information services provide information about the statutory assessment process and Education Health and Care (EHC) plans. *Code of Practice section 2 Impartial information, advice and support and section 9 Education, health and care assessments.*

SEND STANDARD 3: The Local Offer (SEND Code of Practice Section 4)**The LA Family Service Directory contributes to the range of information that makes up the Local Offer**

- 3.1 The Family Service Directory database contributes significantly to the "information published in one place" that makes up the Local Offer for families.
- 3.2 The Family Service Directory includes information about the services and support available for families with children from birth to age 25.
- 3.3 The Family Service Directory and its functionality in respect of the Local Offer has been developed in consultation with families who have children/young people with SEND.
- 3.4 The Family Service Directory is organised in a manner that helps all families to navigate the range of services available, with a particular emphasis on the information that would be pertinent to a family of a child or young person with SEND:
 - (a) There are clear details for each service, about its access and transport arrangements.
 - (b) Any symbols used are clearly explained and these explanations are easy to view. For example by one click on a symbol.
 - (c) The cost (where applicable) and eligibility requirements are clearly defined on each service record.
 - (d) Any organisations that are accredited by another body, are clearly defined and explained in plain English. For example, services that receive mandatory national accreditation by bodies such as Ofsted; those that belong to national federations or membership organisations and those that are accredited by the local authority, for example to offer short breaks for families with SEND.
 - (e) There is an opportunity for children and young people with SEND and their parents/ carers to provide feedback about the services on the directory, for example by providing the ability to feed back, via a web link, online survey or via the directory itself. (See Families First SEND Standard 1.8 in Section Two).
 - (f) There is provision for members of the public to feedback whenever they cannot find a suitable service to access in their area. This information is captured and used to improve the service directory and to identify any potential gaps in service provision. (See Families First SEND Standards 1.8c & 5.5 in Section Two)
 - (g) Information provided by members of the public about services listed on the directory, is appropriately moderated so that potentially libellous accusations are referred to the appropriate organisations and are not published.
 - (h) Where categories, topics or themes are used to help customers navigate the Family Service Directory, these are clearly explained.

- (i) There is information, advice and guidance (either in the directory itself or via a linked website) which helps families make informed decisions when choosing services. For example, check lists, information explaining accreditations, 'how to' guides, quality, and tips about what to ask service providers.
- (j) Serious allegations received by the FIS in relation to services published on the directory, are dealt with effectively and where appropriate, are referred to the relevant Safeguarding authority or Local Area Designated Safeguarding Officer.
- (k) Information is included about how to report a serious concern about a service provider and when/how (and to whom) to make a safeguarding referral, when a member of the public is concerned about the safety of a vulnerable child, young person or adult.

3.5 There are arrangements in place to provide information and signposting, for families who want to access services across local authority boundaries, and there are links to national information, advice and support (some FIS may choose to work together, or use a single Family Service Directory covering two or more local authority areas).

3.6 Wherever practical, the principle of "store and maintain data once published via multiple channels" is employed. For example, where other organisations are already providing national directories of national services for children with SEND these should be signposted or harvested into the local Family Service Directory or provided via an embedded widget, such as the NHS Direct widget.

3.7 The Family Service Directory has been developed in a way that reduces duplication and encourages providers and families (members of the public) to contribute to the richness of the information, for example, with the ability:

- for service providers to update own records;
- for service providers to feedback on customers' comments and star ratings;
- to federate content, and/or provide widgets for use by other websites; and
- to publish federated content, and/or add widgets from other websites, such as NHS Choices.

3.8a The quality of the information in the Family Service Directory (FSD) is regularly reviewed and monitored. This includes information which specifically helps and supports families of children and young people with SEND. (See also Families First Standard 8 in Section One)

3.8b The FSD holds information about universal services (incorporating information about their ability to include and provide for families with SEND within their statutory and legal obligations, such as children's centres, schools, early education, universal health services such as Healthy Child Programme HCP, health visiting and school nursing teams, and childcare providers and colleges).

- 3.8c The FSD holds information about specific/targeted services for children and young people with SEND and their families (including positive activities, access to information about short breaks/ short break providers, respite care, social services, education and health, parenting programmes, private or VCS organisations, portage home education, Parent Partnership Services, and their eligibility criteria).
- 3.8d The FSD holds information about services for young people to help them prepare for adulthood (particular attention is given to those young people with SEND). *Code of Practice section 2.12/2.14.*
- 3.8e The FSD holds information specifically relating to acute and chronic health services, including NHS speech and language therapy (SALT) and physiotherapy, acute and chronic adult service supporting young people, and paediatric palliative teams.
- 3.8f The FSD holds information that families and service users have provided about individual services or the Local Offer in general.
- 3.8g The FSD has the ability for service providers to respond to feedback from service users' compliments and complaints.
- 3.8h The FSD includes or has links to, information and guidance about the use of services that would benefit families of children with SEND, such as general information, referral pathways, paying for services, advice and support.
- 3.9 The Family Service Directory is accessible for members of the public with additional needs or disabilities. For example, with consideration to those with visual or hearing impairment who may access the site either directly or by a screen reader.
- 3.10 Information about SEND is accessible via web pages and/or appears in search results triggered by relevant search terms being inputted (into the LA website and / or Family Service Directory).
- 3.11 LA web based information about SEND is organised so it's quick and easy for families to find what they need, for example:
- by linking information; and/or
 - filtering out information that is not relevant

SEND STANDARD 4: Personal Budgets (SEND Code of Practice section 9.95–9.124)

LA information services contribute to helping families with children and young people with SEND to have more choice and control by understanding and promoting personal budgets in their area

- 4.1 Managers and staff understand how personal budgets operate within their own local area and are able to share information with parents/carers of children and young people with SEND (this includes eligibility criteria and access).
- 4.2 Staff help to alleviate apprehension about managing funding and service provision, by providing information about setting up bank accounts, employing and managing staff (personal assistants), and reclaiming expenses either directly or by signposting to the relevant service.
- 4.3 Staff help families with children with SEND, to understand the range of options available, so that they can make informed choices about their child or young person's education, health and care.
- 4.4 Staff help raise awareness of the important role that parents/carers play in contributing to their child's education, health and care and in contributing to their child's Education, Health and Care plan.
- 4.5 LA information services seek to simplify the information it provides so that parents/carers of children and young people with SEND can clearly understand their options and make informed choices about services and support.
- 4.6 LA information services contribute to raising the level of understanding and awareness among parents with regard to direct payments and personal budgets.
- 4.7 Staff understand and have clarity around, how the money provided as direct payments/ personal budgets can be spent, so that they can explain this to parents/carers and young people.
- 4.8 Staff understand the local procedures for appealing against a decision about an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan and/or the allocation of a personal budget so they can explain this to parents, carers and young people. *See also Code of Practice Section 11 – resolving disagreements.*

SEND STANDARD 5: Collaborative Working (SEND Code of Practice section 3)

LA information services contribute to the collaborative working with parents, health, education and social care and others in supporting families with children with SEND

(See also Families First Standard 11 in Section One)

- 5.1 LA information services proactively seek to develop positive working relationships with key partners and stakeholders, in order that it can provide a high quality service to families with children and young people with SEND (for example, health, social care, early years and childcare services, children's centres, schools, SEN/inclusive services, youth services).
- 5.2 LA information services work collaboratively with its local Parent Partnership Service (this may include information arrangements for signposting, support provided by a collocated or merged service, triage and referral).
- 5.3 LA information services make sure partners are aware of the support provided to families around accessing early education and childcare (in particular specific or specialist support/brokerage for families with children and young people with SEND including any financial assistance available to help pay for childcare).
- 5.4 LA information services make it easy for partner websites (such as schools, council, health, VCS) to redirect to their LA's Local Offer to help promote to families the perception of joined up services. For example, the FIS provides guidance to go out with service provider update forms and by providing a short URL and / or a logo / symbol, by providing some standardised text and / or via the provision of a widget. (See also Families First SEND Standards 3.6 & 3.7 in Section Two).
- 5.5 LA information services seek to work with partners in the VCS and with any local volunteering programmes that support families. For example, parent champions, parent support volunteers, peer support groups, independent supporters who help parents navigate the SEND process.
- 5.6 LA information services seek to work in collaboration with families, giving particular regard to those families who have children and young people with SEND. For example, consulting with families, using feedback to improve the services offered directly by the FIS and other partners/ organisations, asking parents to be on an advisory group or FIS parents' forum, consulting with existing parent forums.
- 5.7 LA information services seek to encourage local families to be involved in the on-going review and sustainability of the Local Offer. For example, via consultation, forums and/or involving them in Family Information Service Steering Groups.
- 5.8 LA information services seek to act as an advocate for parents, carers and young people by building good relationships with families and commissioners and contribute to smarter and flexible services aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Annex 1: Relevant Guidance & Statutory Documentation

The list below is intended to be guide and is in no way an exhaustive list:

- Aiming High for Disabled Children: Better Support for Families
- The Childcare Act 2006
- Childcare Strategy for Wales – Childcare is for Children 2004
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Data Protection Act 2003
- Duty to Provide Information Advice and Assistance; Guidance for Local Authorities 2006
- Education for Three and Four Year Olds and Securing Sufficient Childcare 2012
- Equality and Human Rights Commission related legislation
- Equalities Act 2010
- The Families First SEND Framework for Family Information Services MiP 2 / DfE (2014)
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Integrated Strategy for the Early Years (Scotland)
- Meeting the Challenge. Quality Standards in Education for More Able and Talented Pupils May 2008
- More great childcare: Raising quality and giving parents more choice 2013
- National Children and Young People's Participation Standards May 2007
- Ofsted's Parent View website: www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk/
- Rights to Action (Wales)
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Schools Admission Code (DfE 2012)
- Special educational and disabilities code of practice (2014)
- Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2012
- Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on the Delivery of Free Early Education (2013)
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Welsh Language Act 1993
- Welsh language strategy: action plan 2013 to 2014

Families First Quality Award

for Family Information Services

Version: 1.3

Release date: November 2014

The Families First Quality Award for Family Information Services is administered by the Family and Childcare Trust in association with the National Association of Family Information Services (NAFIS)



Family and Childcare Trust

The Bridge, 81 Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 0NQ

E info@familyandchildcaretrust.org

familyandchildcaretrust.org

Registered in England & Wales No. 3753345. Registered Charity No. 1077444. VAT Registration No. 833 0243 65

Families First and NAFIS are run by the Family and Childcare Trust.

All rights reserved. © Family and Childcare Trust 2014