

Neutral Citation Number [2025] EWFC 484 (B)

Case No: BS24C50367

IN THE FAMILY COURT (FDAC)

Gloucestershire Family and County Court

Date: 19/12/2025

**Before :
District Judge Tait**

Between :

Gloucestershire County Council

Applicant

- And –

D

First Respondent

- And –

E

Second Respondent

- And –

G (A child)

Third Respondent

L Hutton for the Applicant Local Authority

M Saunders of DS Legal for the First Respondent

C Cephas of WSP Solicitors for the Second Respondent

F Davies of HCR Solicitors for the Child, by her Guardian

Hearing dates: 19 December 2025

Judgment

This judgment was delivered in private. The judge has given leave for this version of the judgment to be published on condition that (irrespective of what is contained in the judgment) in any published version of the judgment the anonymity of the child and members of their family must be strictly preserved. All persons, including representatives of the media, must ensure that this condition is strictly complied with. Failure to do so will be a contempt of court.

Introduction

1. I am making decisions about the upbringing of G, a 13-month-old girl. The proceedings are brought by Gloucestershire County Council (the Local Authority).

Background

2. G's mother is D. Her four older children have all been removed from her care. Her eldest child lives with their father, the other three were made subject of adoption orders following care proceedings.
3. D has a long history of substance misuse including cocaine and alcohol. As is so often the case, her difficulties with substances were combined with abusive relationships, poor mental health and a long history of poor engagement with services and professionals.
4. G's father (E) has not taken part in these proceedings. He was joined as a party on 12 February 2025 following DNA testing. He has not attended contact in over six months. He has not been in contact with the social worker since and his legal representative appears today without instructions.
5. Threshold under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 is plainly met. The father has not responded to the initial threshold and I include the findings sought against him.
6. In relation to G, Mother disclosed her pregnancy to antenatal care at 26 weeks. This delayed pre-birth planning and the prospects of a different outcome appeared to be very slim. The Local Authority made an application for an interim care order which was granted when G was four days old. She was discharged from hospital into a foster placement.

Referral to FDAC

7. D was still using cocaine and alcohol (albeit at a reduced level) when G was nearly 3 months old. Given some signs of progress, enquiries were made about a transfer to the Family Drugs and Alcohol Court (FDAC) for an assessment. Even after that, Mother disclosed a 2-day lapse.
8. Despite this, and because there happened to be capacity within the FDAC and Turn Around for Children Service (TACS), mother was accepted into FDAC a month later. The proceedings had already passed 26 weeks by that point and were extended. D has not looked back since. She has been abstinent from all illicit substances and alcohol since the lapse, a period of over seven months.
9. During this time, Mother has fully engaged with support from the TACS team which has included —
 - a. Accessing support from the TACS team including the Substance Misuse Practitioner, Consultant Psychiatrist, Occupational Therapist, Social Worker, Mental Health Practitioner and Health Visitor.
 - b. Attending CRA (Community Reinforcement Approach) Sessions.
 - c. Attendance at AA meetings.
10. G was reunified into her mother's care three months ago and has remained there since.
11. The local authority seeks a 12-month Supervision Order to continue their support for mother and child. There is no opposition to this. This is agreed by mother and supported by child's Guardian, who has been involved in previous proceedings.
12. It has been a remarkable turnaround for D.

Welfare Checklist

13. G's welfare is my paramount concern, and I must consider the factors set out in section 1(3) of the Children Act 1989 (the "welfare checklist"):

14. G has a close bond with her mother and is a happy and thriving baby in her care. As well as the basic physical needs of any child of her age, she has an emotional need to be brought up within her birth family if that can be safely achieved.
15. The basis of the proposed order is that she will remain in her mother's care where she is so settled and happy. She has recently celebrated her first birthday with her mother and has just (is about to) take her first steps.
16. She has four half-siblings, one of which she sees regularly when they spend time with mother.
17. She is at risk of harm, however, should mother lapse into substance use, enter an abusive relationship or suffer a dip in her mental health. Mother has demonstrated that she can remain abstinent for a significant period of time. She loves G and is fully committed to caring for her. Nevertheless, she is still within the first 12 months of recovery and is therefore vulnerable to lapse. She is not complacent and has repeated every two weeks to me that she takes "one day at a time". She is rightly proud of her achievement and celebrates it in a healthy way. She expresses genuine enjoyment in her new substance-free life. Her new-found confidence and independence is a very obvious sign of the changes she has made.
18. D has evidenced over seven months of abstinence, with her testing being consistently negative for substances including alcohol. She has accessed and engaged with all the interventions and support TACS have offered.
19. Mother separated from the father prior to G's birth. She has experienced domestic abuse in a number of her relationships and the father of G was arrested for assault of mother whilst pregnant in June 2024. He was bailed, but even so, mother did not support a prosecution. She did obtain a non-molestation order at the outset of these proceedings. She has meaningfully engaged with the 'Safer Relationships Protective Parent Programme'. This has supported her openness and understanding of domestic violence, and the impact on her parenting and children.

20. D attends her AA groups three times per week and is in the process of completing her 12-Step work with her Sponsor. D is clear that attendance at AA will continue forever for her. D has a support network which includes some peers from FDAC, peers from AA, her sponsor, her mother and wider family.
21. D's home continues to be clean, tidy and suitable for G with everything needed to ensure she is safe and cared for.
22. Therefore, I am satisfied that she has the capacity to meet G's needs so long as she is able to maintain the progress she has made.

Conclusion

23. It is for that reason that I conclude that a Supervision Order is necessary to support mother for a period of 12 months, by which time, she will be well into a secure recovery. D recognizes that her recovery is lifelong and will not be easy. One hopes that by the end of the supervision order, it will be a bit less hard.
24. Accordingly, I make a 12-month supervision order and endorse the supervision order support plan. The TACS social worker will remain the allocated social worker and support the family during this time. There will be informal review meetings at court, which I look forward to.

Closing Comments

25. I wish to acknowledge the outstanding work of all those in the social work team. I suspect that outcomes like this are career highlights. I thank the Guardian for her longstanding involvement with the family and all of the legal representatives and advocates who have supported this, including identifying this matter as a candidate for the limited availability of FDAC earlier this year.
26. I want to say a few words more generally. It is so very clear on the evidence before me that this outcome could not have been achieved without FDAC. The tailored support that

mother has comprehensively taken advantage of has given her the platform to put herself in a position to care for her child. She has celebrated G's first birthday, her first steps and is looking forward to enjoying Christmas together. One cannot put a price on this. Particularly when one considers mother's own history and barriers to this progress.

27. As a judge, I assess evidence and draw conclusions. The evidence before me is overwhelming that FDAC works. If this example can be used to add to that growing body of evidence, I hope that there will be other children and families that will benefit from a wider incorporation of FDAC and problem-solving courts. This local authority has committed to and embraced FDAC for many years and sees the results (this is the second graduation in a fortnight at this court). FDAC is an investment that the evidence demonstrates repays this local authority and the public purse threefold. Furthermore, it has given this family a genuine opportunity to live healthily and happily together.

28. This has not been solely about drugs and alcohol. As part of the work with mother, she has received support with her mental health and completed significant work in relation to domestic abuse, of which she is a survivor. The role of FDAC in supporting families and children by helping parents to recognize and address the impact of domestic abuse, which is so often a feature of these cases, cannot be underestimated.