

# Mediation to help thousands more families avoid costly legal battles

- thousands more people to receive mediation vouchers for family disputes
- more than 8,400 vouchers already used – 10,200 more now funded
- 65 percent of cases reach whole or partial agreements away from court

An extra £5.4 million in funding will help even more families to resolve disputes away from court, such as contact arrangements for children.

Under the scheme, £500 mediation vouchers are provided to divorcing couples with the aim of helping them find mutually agreeable solutions and freeing up space in the family courts. It seeks to spare parents and their children the anxiety and cost of often lengthy and acrimonious courtroom disputes.

The scheme has been a success with around two-thirds of cases reaching full or partial agreements away from court.

The money announced today (3 June 2022) more than doubles the investment into the initiative since its launch in March last year which now totals £8.7 million.

It will provide around 10,200 additional vouchers for mediation services – adding to the 8,400 which have been issued so far.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Dominic Raab said:

We are investing over £5 million this year alone to help more families to resolve their disputes without the stress and trauma of lengthy courtroom battles.

Mediation protects children, by removing the bitterness of parental disputes from the amplifying effect of a courtroom – and allows the family courts to focus on adjudicating cases with serious safeguarding concerns, including domestic abuse.

Mediation is often a quicker and cheaper way of resolving disputes. It involves couples working through their differences – led by a trained and accredited mediator – to reach agreements they are both prepared to accept, such as how to split assets or arrange child contact times, rather than have a judge decide for them. The specialist mediator helps participants to reach solutions tailored to their circumstances with many coming to agreements within 2 sessions.

Preliminary research from the Family Mediation Council (FMC), who run the scheme, show promising results. Survey data of the first 2,800 completed cases using the vouchers revealed 65 percent reached either a whole or

partial agreement away from court, while a further 3 percent only attended court to formalise their agreement. It also showed 50 percent of participants would not have attempted mediation without the financial incentive offered by the scheme.

Without the vouchers, mediation sessions would normally be charged for unless one of the parties has access to legal aid.

If a case is eligible for vouchers, the mediator will automatically claim back the contributions from the FMC. The investment announced today will extend the initiative to March 2023.

## Notes to editors

- In total, an extra £5.38 million is being invested in the scheme, bringing total funding to just under £8.68 million since March 2021.
- The scheme is administered by the Family Mediation Council, on behalf of the Ministry of Justice.
- Further information about the scheme and how it works is provided to parties at their Mediation Information and Assessment Meeting (MIAM), which all those involved in family cases are required to attend, unless they have a valid exemption.
- Mediation can be undertaken by other family members, not just separating parents.
- In June, 2020, [we announced a major overhaul of the family courts](#) to protect domestic abuse victims which included more special protections in courts, stronger powers for judges, and piloting Integrated Domestic Abuse Courts.
- In June, 2020, the [Divorce Act received Royal Assent](#), which will remove the needless 'blame game' that can harm children while ensuring couples have the time to reflect, plan for the future, or if necessary to turn back. This came into [force on 6 April, 2022](#).
- We're investing record amounts across our courts and tribunals, with £324 million over the next three years to improve timeliness in civil and family courts and tribunals. Another £200 million will complete our £1.3 billion court reform programme, modernising the justice system to make it quicker and more efficient.

## What is family mediation?

- Family mediation is a process in which an independent, professionally trained mediator helps parties work out arrangements for children and finances where there is a dispute.
- The mediator is not there to tell each side what to do, but can help them reach an agreement while trying to improve communication between them. They aren't there to try and keep couples together but help them find a practical way forward after a relationship has broken down.
- Mediation allows the parties to stay in control, as no one will be forced to do or agree to anything against their wishes. Unlike in a courtroom both partners can agree to a solution rather than have a judge decide for them.
- The mediator will work with the parties, either together or separately,

to help them find a solution which works for them both.

- Mediation can be less stressful than going to court, especially for children who are involved in proceedings. It is also cheaper than going through the court process, and it is also confidential unlike proceedings in the family court.
- Prior to the voucher scheme, funded mediation was only available for those who meet the financial requirements through the Legal Aid scheme.
- Agreements made in mediation can be made legally binding by a court if necessary and the legal support to do this can be offered.