



This is a great day for a great city. I have spent all of my professional life working in Liverpool. I began as a barrister in 1987 and became a circuit judge in 2013. I could not contemplate working permanently anywhere else. I love this city and its people, and I want only good things for it.

The launch of the Liverpool Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) is just that. It represents a major achievement for the family justice system in this city, and the realisation of a personal ambition as Designated Family Judge.

The intensive program, run by a multidisciplinary team, helps families affected by the complex challenges presented by the damaging effects of drug and alcohol abuse, domestic abuse and mental health problems. We know this problem-solving approach works and gives families the best chance of staying together or being reunited, when it is safe and in the best interests of the children to do so.

I have been committed to bringing FDAC to Liverpool since 2018 when the previous Designated Family Judge asked me to be the judicial lead to work collaboratively with all nine local authorities in Cheshire and Merseyside to formulate a bid for government money. That bid failed, but my determination to bring FDAC here has never waned, and with the arrival of Jenny Turnross as Director of Children's Services for Liverpool City Council from Birmingham and her determination to introduce FDAC here, we had the catalyst that we needed. As I met her, I knew that she was not going to fail.

This is also big news for the family justice system nationally. You only have to see the list of speakers today:

Sir Andrew McFarlane, the President of the Family Division of England and Wales

Lord Justice Peter Jackson Judicial Lead for FDAC

Lord Frederick Ponsonby the under Secretary of State for Justice

In addition, Mrs Justice Gwynneth Knowles, the Family Presiding Judge for the Northern Circuit and previous Judicial Lead for FDAC is here.

That gives a clear message of the importance of FDAC and the significance of its arrival in Liverpool.

I am immensely grateful to all of them for their involvement today.

We can achieve great things with FDAC here in Liverpool. In my view that will extend beyond dealing with families in the here and now, trying to achieve abstinence from substance use by the parents, with a view to trying to keep families together.

A dark cloud hangs over this beautiful city. That is organised crime, illicit drug supply and child criminal exploitation, often through 'county lines.' It is no coincidence that I was asked to give evidence as the judicial expert before the Jay Review into child criminal exploitation set up by Action for Children and did so with the approval of the President. I have spent a large part of my judicial life making Deprivation of Liberty Declarations and secure accommodation orders. These orders are very much used in cases of last resort and are used to safeguard often damaged and very vulnerable teenagers from catastrophic harm or death as a result of their involvement in 'county lines'.

It is my view that organised criminals are able to feed on cyclical, generational substance use by parents, such that illicit drugs are viewed as part of normal life by children. How good it would be if families entering care proceedings, where there is such a history of drug use, were able to engage with FDAC and receive the support and services needed to help them achieve abstinence whilst the children are still young. I am convinced that there will be long-term benefits of diverging these children away from future teenage years, ensnared in the pernicious activities of those who would exploit them for financial gain.

I firmly believe that we can achieve great things with FDAC here in Liverpool. The ambition now is to build a strong, sustainable model which can then form a solid basis to expand, with the ultimate ambition to have all nine local authorities in Cheshire and Merseyside having access to FDAC.

It was my privilege and pleasure to train with the new FDAC team. I always knew that Liverpool was crammed with talented young people. The team that has been put together by Sarah Alexander is a living example of that talent. I could not have been more impressed by them. They will also be managed superbly by Carol Bachelor, another recruit from Birmingham. I have every confidence that they will provide outstanding work for the families of Liverpool.

I am also very pleased with the team of judges that I have selected in judges Helen Brandon, Faye Coker and Angela Holligan. They are all hugely committed to the project, and they all possess the qualities that are needed for excellent FDAC judges.

Thank you also so much for attending to support this event. I am truly grateful.

His Honour Judge Steven Parker

Designated Family Judge for Cheshire and Merseyside

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