

8 June 2015**Agenda Item: 9****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****CONTACT SERVICE UPDATE****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an update on the Contact Service with regard to looked after children and the progress that has been achieved following the review of the Service.

Information and Advice

2. The local authority has a statutory duty to provide and promote contact – unless it is not in the best interests of the child.
3. The primary law and key reference documents emphasise the need for the child to be at the centre of planning contact arrangements. The Children Act 1989 and case law (decisions of the higher courts) identifies contact as 'a right of the child' - birth parents, relatives and others do not have a 'right' to contact, although local authorities must provide and promote contact, providing evidence to court if they are planning to change or withdraw contact.
4. The 'Good Practice Guidance Note ADCS/CAFCASS-2013' also emphasises the need for contact to be in the best interests of the child and, in particular, the level of contact must be based upon observation of the contact and the need to adjust the plan if contact is detrimental to the child. This is fundamental to the new service model.
5. The Contact Service provides a County-wide service and has been operational since June 2012, following an 18 month pilot project. In September 2013 a review of the service was initiated and the service is now working to revised practice guidance and procedures. The child has remained the focus of all decision making and key processes within the new service model.

Core Offer

6. The Contact Service 'Core offer' is to 'provide supervised contact to children and young people who are looked after by the Local Authority to inform their permanency plan until this is agreed'. Priority will be given to cases within the court arena and where there is a requirement to provide evidence to the proceedings. Contact will also be supervised where there continues to be evidence of 'significant risk' to a child/ young person and where no other alternative is appropriate. The Contact Service will also provide supervised contact for a time limited period to children who may be at risk and report to inform the future plan for the child with regard to contact arrangements.

Venues

7. The greatest concern identified at the beginning of the review period was the lack of exclusive use of venues in each district. This created a reliance on ad hoc bookings of alternative venues which the service had no control over in terms of scheduling and ensuring rooms were age appropriate, safe and clean for children. The new service model has enabled:
- venues that are fit for purpose with age appropriate accommodation
 - children to access sessions outside of school times without being restricted by external venue opening times which has reduced the time pressures on staff
 - increased safety for Contact Support Workers (CSWs)
 - the ability to control infection and keep rooms clean
 - staff control over booking contact rooms
 - a reduction to changes and cancellations
 - better consistency of worker for the child, which contributes to safeguarding priorities and best outcomes for the child
 - a reduction in CSW travel time which leads to increased capacity to supervise more sessions and upload notes in a timely manner
 - a reduction in mileage spend by CSWs travelling between venues.
8. The County is split into three areas: North, Central and South districts:

North:

Worksop - Priory Contact Centre - the venue has been open since September 2014. The venue is getting very well used for contacts and assessments, meetings and training. Facilities are for all age groups - indoors there are 2 rooms for babies, 2 for toddlers, 2 for teenagers & family groups, 2 kitchen areas and 2 bathrooms. There is a large outdoor grassed area which is securely fenced. There is a tennis court which is also used for bike riding etc.

Retford Office at Chancery Lane is currently used for Retford contacts and high risk contacts. There are 4 contact rooms, including a baby room, a toddler room, a teenage room and a large family room. Contact staff have developed the areas to make them child friendly.

Ollerton Contact Centre - based on the Dukeries Academy School site. Contacts have taken place from mid-September 2014. There are facilities for most age groups; however, some more resources are required for older children. There are 2 large rooms for all ages and a small baby room. There is a bathroom with nappy changing facilities and 2 kitchen areas which can be used for bottle making and preparation of food.

Central:

Sandybank Family Centre - this established family centre has been reorganised and some refurbishment has taken place to ensure it now offers age appropriate rooms and activities. There are eight available rooms for contact and a small outside space.

Meadow House, Littleworth, Mansfield – this continues to be used for high risk contacts.

South:

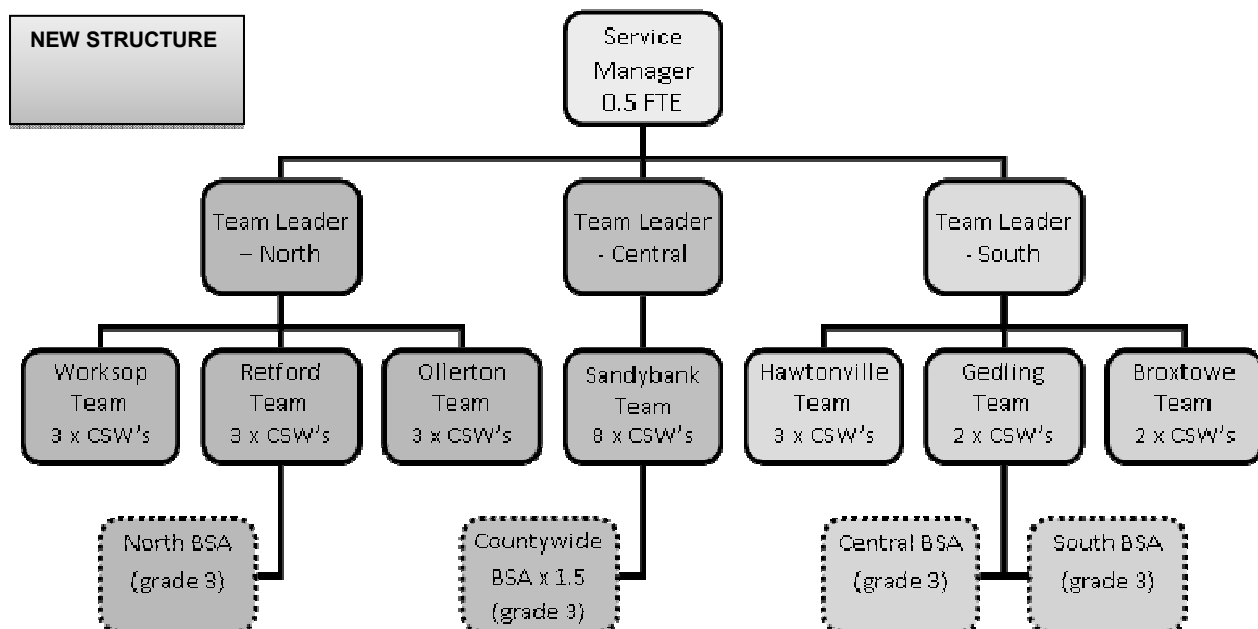
Hawtonville, Newark - this established venue has been reorganised and the two contact rooms are now age appropriate. Work is underway to improve the outside of the property.

Beeston Central Children's Centre - this venue has been in use since September 2014 and has 3 age appropriate contact rooms. This venue is being used well.

Sir John Robinson Way - this office venue is used for Gedling and higher risk contacts.

Staffing

9. The new structure is as follows:



10. This structure provides a number of significant benefits:

- CSW team numbers now vary in size and reflect the geographical demand for supervised contact sessions in each area. This does require on-going review as demand can vary and countywide flexibility is required.
- there will always be one member of staff at each venue as cover in case of emergencies, to greet new families and to upload their supervision notes
- relief staff are allocated to a specific venue but may be expected to work across the service, where necessary. The use of relief staff is also reviewed regularly.
- a small pool of sessional staff have been retained for use in emergencies
- service delivery hours have been extended to Monday – Friday, 8.30am - 7pm and some occasional weekend working is required
- the job description has been revised and now reflects what is required of the CSW
- work is progressing for CSWs to gain the QCF Level 3 qualification in Child Care.

Transport

11. Staff have historically been required to transport children across large geographical areas; this has been a very costly and an inefficient use of resources. The new Service model includes the expectation that foster carers where possible transport children to contact. This replicates what would happen within any family and therefore will generally be in the best interests of the child. This is particularly so when the permanency plan has been agreed and they are in foster care until adulthood. The majority of foster carers have embraced the new model. The Contact Service continues to support carers who are unable to commit to this request. Training for foster carers has also been provided.
12. There are service level agreements in place with Bassetlaw Action Group in the North of the County and Nottingham City for the South, to provide volunteer drivers to support this service in partnership. Bassetlaw is working well; further work is required with Nottingham City as recruitment of drivers has been challenging. On-going advertisements and open days will hopefully increase interest in this role.

Mobilisation

13. CSWs have been provided with a mobile tablet (IPad). This enables staff to record their observations of contact and upload them immediately to Framework. Social workers, who have case responsibility, now have instant access to these records for the purpose of care planning and applications to court. The second stage of this process has enabled two team leaders to electronically access all workers timetables and oversee their commitments and is anticipated that the third team leader should have access once the new devices are in place. Representatives of the Contact Service will be sharing their experiences of mobilisation with colleagues from Leeds in the next few weeks.

Systems improvements

14. The paper referral form has been replaced with an electronic form that is completed through Framework. The referral form has also been revised and better reflects the information that is required by the service. The team leaders now have oversight of all cases and allocate directly to the CSW. This means that they are able to respond quickly and efficiently to problems or concerns. The successful use of One Space has assisted planning and room booking by staff for their allocated cases.

Review of cases

15. All existing contact arrangements have been reviewed to determine whether they fit the new service model. This will continue to be reviewed to ensure the model and core offer is meeting the needs of children, families, social workers and other stakeholders.

Monitoring and audit

16. Moving forward, greater emphasis will be placed upon planning and reviewing contact arrangements. Improved reporting through Business Objects will enable more effective monitoring and planning of the service. New cases are now regularly reviewed by the management team every three months.

Ongoing service developments:

17. These are as follows:

- a) Review of the Core Offer - work will continue to ensure the service is meeting the needs of children and families
- b) Training – work will continue to ensure all staff are trained at a level appropriate to the task required
- c) Business Objects reports – further work to continue to ensure accurate monthly reporting to management team is available
- d) Staffing will continue to be reviewed to ensure the needs of the service are met in the most effective manner.

Other Options Considered

18. The report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

19. The report is for noting only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

20. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the update on the changing role of the Contact Service with regard to looked after children and the progress that has been achieved throughout a review of the Service be noted.

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Constitutional Comments

21. As this report is for noting only no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (SS 13/05/15)

22. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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