

22 September 2014**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 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.

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. The legal and procedural framework that underpins the Contact Service can be quite confusing as there are references to contact in all legislation, standards and guidance relating to looked after children.
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 currently provides a County-wide service and has been operational since June 2012, following an 18 month pilot project. The Service has grown and developed incrementally in response to increasing and changing demands. For example, in August 2013, 476 children were having contact arranged by the Contact Service compared with 269 in August 2012 – an increase of 77% in terms of caseloads.
6. As a consequence of the rapid growth and a number of concerns regarding the quality of contact, the Service was deemed to be no longer fit for purpose and it was recognised that changes would be required in order to provide a more cohesive, responsive and child centred service moving into the future.

7. The Service had developed incrementally to meet a range of needs and it was acknowledged that the child should remain the focus of all decision making and key processes in the new service model.
8. In July 2013 the Transformation/Improvement Team was therefore asked to review the Contact Service in order to address the pressing concerns, relating to issues of service capacity in both the arrangement and operation of contact and associated issues relating to safeguarding and reputational risk.
9. A Position Statement was submitted to the Programme Board in September 2013, with a series of recommendations. The decision was made to launch a project to explore some of the recommendations made and the project was initiated and an Interim Service Manager was appointed.
10. The project identified specific service areas that required improvement and which aimed to achieve the following objectives:
 - to ensure that contact sessions remain a safe and productive environment for looked after children to maintain and develop relationships with their birth family
 - to ensure that the service capacity, processes and procedures are robust enough to deal with the increase in demand whilst remaining value for money
 - to ensure that all staff have sufficient training and qualifications in order to do the job to the best of their ability
 - to reduce the average travel time for Contact Support Workers and the resulting cost in mileage
 - to create a flexible and responsive service
 - to ensure measurements are in place to evaluate outcomes
 - to adapt relief staffing arrangements to ensure that relief staff are used in a relief capacity and not to cover business as usual
 - to listen to and take into consideration the views of key stakeholders, including Looked After Children, Fostering and Adoption Social Workers, Foster Carers, and Birth Families
 - to ensure that the service is targeted at families and children who are most in need
 - to ensure that the service is tailored and time-limited appropriately, depending on the regular reviews and risk assessments carried out
 - to increase availability of suitable venues
 - to ensure that contact documentation is robust enough to support court proceedings, where applicable.

Consultation:

11. Children and young people have been consulted through the Children in Care Council and reported that:
 - 24% would prefer evening sessions (6-8pm)
 - 33% would prefer weekend sessions
 - they wanted venues which have activities they enjoy doing, are safe and are close to where they live.
12. Foster Carers – via phone consultation, Fostering in Nottingham newsletter, Fronter and Foster Carer Liaison and Advisory Group (FLAG) meetings:

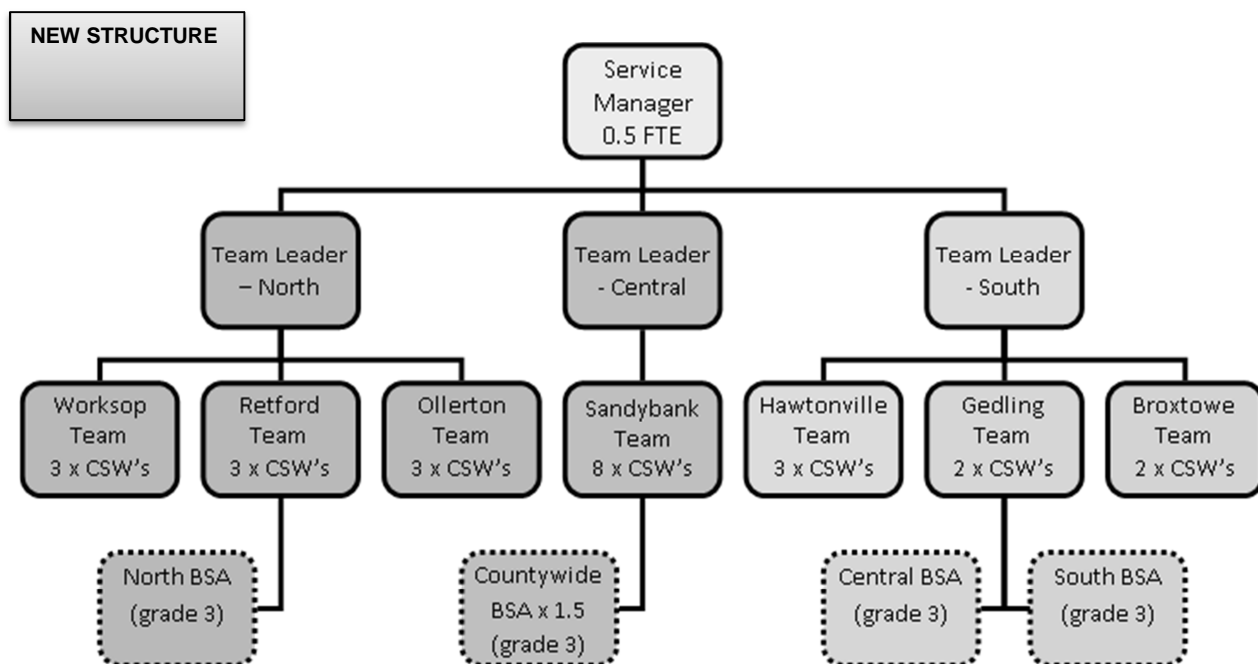
- contact hours to be more flexible to include evenings and weekends
- consistency in worker and transporter for the child as paramount to the child's needs and ability to form a relationship
- acknowledgement of Foster Carer as transporter as an ideal role to ensure consistency for children during travel to and from contact
- request for additional transport allowance and training and support for Foster Carers to transport children.
- *'Is it not time that correctly equipped and strategically placed places were found that would make a contact a happier time?'*

Venues

13. The new service model was accepted by Divisional Leadership Team (DLT) and proposes a radically different service. The County is split into three areas; north, central and south districts. 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 the ad hoc bookings of alternative venues which the service has no control over in terms of scheduling and ensuring rooms are age appropriate, safe and clean for children.
14. We have now secured exclusive use of specific venues across the County and staff will be based at these venues from 1 September 2014 (see **Appendix 1**). This will provide a number of significant benefits:
 - children can access sessions outside of school times without being restricted by external venue opening times which will reduce the time pressures on staff
 - increased safety for Contact Support Workers (CSWs)
 - fit for purpose and age appropriate accommodation
 - ability to control infection and keep rooms clean
 - control over booking contact rooms
 - reduction to changes and cancellations outside the service's control
 - better consistency of worker for the child, which contributes to safeguarding priorities and best outcomes for the child
 - reduction in CSW travel time will lead to increased capacity to supervise more sessions and upload notes in a timely manner
 - a reduction in mileage spend by CSWs travelling between venues
 - the service will have extra capacity and flexibility to deal with any increase in referrals or in case of staff absence.

Staffing

15. We have reviewed the current staffing and the role of the Contact Support Worker (CSW). Part of this review has also removed the role of the Contact Co-ordinator who provides a business support function. Other changes proposed within the model mean that the CSWs will now arrange their own contacts and therefore we are proposing a reduction in business support posts. The new structure is as follows:



16. This 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
- 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
- staff will complete 2½ - 3 sessions each per day on a caseload model, which equates to 1,260 – 1,512 sessions per month. This ensures that the service has enough flexibility built in to be able to cope with any potential increase in demand in LAC numbers and reliance on relief staff will reduce
- relief staff will be allocated to a specific venue but may be expected to work across the service, where necessary
- a pool of sessional staff will be retained for use in emergencies
- service delivery hours have been extended to Monday – Friday, 8.30am - 7pm and some weekend working will be required
- the job description has been revised and now reflects what is required of the CSW. This has been approved by the Job Evaluation Team.

17. In addition, we have proposed a number of changes to staff working arrangements to ensure that staff are available to deliver the service in the most efficient and cost effective way. This process has been subject to HR oversight and we are continuing to seek agreement with individual staff.

Transport

18. Staff have historically been required to transport children across large geographical areas, This has been a very costly and inefficient use of resources and has led to a £64,624 spend on staff mileage during the first nine months of financial year 2013/14, with more than half of this being spent in the Newark and Bassetlaw areas. Travel time seriously limits CSW capacity to supervise more than two sessions on average and record supervision notes onto Framework in a timely manner.

19. The alternative model, which has been approved by the Divisional Leadership Team (DLT), proposes that, where possible, foster carers transport children to contact. This would replicate 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. However, there will inevitably be some exceptions and we will consider these on an individual basis.
20. Where a foster carer is unable to transport a child, we are seeking to provide a volunteer driver. We are anticipating that the volunteer will be a named driver and will be consistent throughout the duration of the contact arrangements.
21. Negotiations are underway with Bassetlaw Action Group in the North of the County and Nottingham City for the South, to develop this service in partnership. This will be a pilot for six months and is planned to start from 1 October 2014. The pilot will be reviewed and evaluated with clear recommendations for the future.

A service that is 'fit for purpose'

22. In order to ensure that the service is fit for purpose, a number of other significant changes have been made. All systems, processes and procedures were reviewed using the Lean2 model. The service was very inefficient and overly bureaucratic. As a consequence of this a number of significant improvements have been made:
 - a) Mobilisation: all 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, will now have instant access to these records for the purpose of care planning and applications to court as they will be uploaded to the case file within 24 hours of the contact session. The second stage of this process will enable Team Leaders to electronically access all workers timetables and oversee their commitments and is anticipated to be in place by the end of September 2014.
 - b) Systems improvements: 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.
 - c) Criteria: clear criteria have been established to ensure that those children and young people who are the subject of proceedings or at risk of significant harm are prioritised.
 - d) Review of cases: all existing contact arrangements have been reviewed to determine whether they fit the new service model. These have been further reviewed and an action plan has been developed to monitor the progress of those cases that remain open.
 - e) Monitoring and audit: moving forward, greater emphasis will be placed upon planning and reviewing contact arrangements. Improved reporting through Business Objects will mean that new cases are now regularly reviewed by the management team every three months. A formal review process has been proposed that fits with the LAC

Review process, however, this is not yet embedded into practice and requires further work. The Improvement Team will continue to have oversight of the service over the next two years and it is anticipated that further improvements can be made.

- f) Case records have been reviewed and a new audit system has been incorporated into the quarterly monitoring programme. The Contact Service was not previously included.
- g) Training has been reviewed: core skills training has been delivered to all staff by the management team and we can now be confident that staff are equipped to perform their duties. Further training is planned and will be delivered in October and November 2014. All CSWs will now require QCF level 3 (previously NVQ level 3 (Child Care) as the minimum entry qualification. All current CSWs will complete this qualification over the forthcoming year. This will ensure that we have a suitably qualified workforce.

Economic benefits:

- 23. Whilst not the original objective of the review, there have been some significant savings predicted from the review as outlined below. For the current year, it will be necessary to invest in new buildings, resources and equipment however, it is anticipated that there will be overall savings in the future.

PROJECTED SAVINGS		PROJECT SPEND	
Staffing	£199,518	Staff training	£27,300
Activities spend	£12,000	New venue costs	£30,000
CSW mileage for transporting children to contact	£15,000		
	£226,518		£57,300
TOTAL SAVINGS	£169,218		

**Plus predicted contribution to Business
Support Review Savings of £66,079**

- 24. Savings have been accounted for in the Looked After Children Outline Business Case and will be monitored by the Transformation Team in liaison with the appropriate Finance Business Partner.

Conclusion:

- 25. A communication plan was agreed at the beginning of the project and has been regularly reviewed. As with any change process there has been some resistance to change. We have tried to respond in a positive and proactive way in an attempt to resolve concerns as they have arisen. We have however recently revised our communication plan to ensure that the right message is communicated consistently across the County and we have identified those individuals or groups that require further support to manage the transition. We have throughout the process welcomed feedback, views and opinions and will continue to do so as we are confident our new service model provides significant improvements to the Contact Service and ensures that all arrangements are in the best interests of the child.

Other Options Considered

26. The report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

27. The report is for noting only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

28. 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.

Steve Edwards
Service Director, Children's Social Care

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Di Brady
Interim Service Manager
T: 01623 631101
E: diane.brady@nottsccl.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments

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

Financial Comments (KLA 05/09/14)

30. The financial implications of the report are included in paragraphs 23 and 24 above.

Background Papers and Published Documents

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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