

18th March 2019**Agenda Item: 4****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL
WORK****CONTACT SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an update on the Contact Service with regard to the supervision of contact for looked after children.

Information

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 Contact Service.
5. The Contact Service provides a County-wide service and has been operational since June 2012. In September 2013 a full review of the service was initiated and the service has embedded the revised practice guidance and procedures. The child has remained the focus of all decision making and key processes within the service model.
6. The core offer is:
 - the Contact Service 'core offer' is to 'provide supervised contact to children who are looked after by the Local Authority to inform their permanency plan until this is agreed'. Priority is given to cases within the court arena and where there is a requirement to provide evidence to the proceedings
 - contact is also supervised where there continues to be evidence of 'significant risk' to a child 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.

7. The Contact Service has extended the service, and where possible has supervised the contacts held in the Looked After Children team, to support the contact arrangements for long term looked after children.
8. There are Nottinghamshire looked after children placed over the UK who may require supervised contact with their families; this is a challenge to support and, depending on the distance involved, an independent agency is commissioned to supervise on the Council's behalf.
9. Service delivery is Monday – Friday, 8.30am – 7pm, and some occasional weekend work.
10. The Contact Service provides an average of 700 contacts per month. The referrals on average relate to 20 referrals each month.
11. The County is split into three areas: north, central and south districts. North covers Retford, Worksop and Ollerton; central covers Mansfield and Ashfield, and south covers Broxtowe, Rushcliffe, Gedling and Newark.

Venues

12. There are dedicated venues across the County to ensure:
 - children are transported within a reasonable time
 - venues which 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
 - 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.

North:

Ollerton Contact Centre – based on the Dukeries Academy School site. This venue continues to work well for all ages; there is a total of four rooms, which includes a kitchen area which works well for older children. The Council pays a fixed charge for the facility usage. No high risk contacts take place here, they would take place at Welbeck House, Ollerton.

Worksop – Priory Contact Centre – this has a total of nine rooms suitable for all ages, and an outdoor play area. There are three kitchens which allow for activities similar to in a

home setting, and are useful for assessed contact. This venue can also be used for contact which requires a lower level or no supervision, but for which a private space is required.

Retford Office at Chancery Lane – there are two to three rooms available here, and no outdoor play area. This venue is used for higher risk contacts.

Central:

Sandy Bank – this is considered as the central base of the Contact Service. Team leaders work across their area in the respective venues to ensure management presence and oversight. Sandy Bank has ten rooms available for contact, there are kitchen facilities and outdoor play areas, and the centre continues to be well used. Meadow House is also used for high risk contacts.

South:

Beeston Central Children's Centre – this venue has three rooms, kitchen facilities and an outdoor play area, and is easily accessible from the tram service. The Children's Centre will be vacating the property, and the Contact Service will remain.

Sir John Robinson Way – two rooms are available. There are no kitchen facilities or outdoor play, but there is an accessible local park for contact that can be safely managed. The venue is well used.

Hawtonville Children's Centre, Newark – there are four rooms available here, an outdoor area and kitchen. These rooms are fully utilised.

Transport

13. It is usual practice for the foster carer to transport children to and from contact. In exceptional circumstances the contact service workers will transport children. There is a continued increase in family and friends foster carers, and these carers are most likely to support with travel to contact.
14. However it remains a challenge to transport children with their best interests at the centre, in terms of reducing children's time travelling each week, and in addition to the use of taxis (with or without escorts), when foster carers cannot transport.

Staffing

15. The establishment is: 0.5 full-time equivalent (fte) Children's Service Manager (CSM), 3 fte Team Leaders, and 23.5 fte Contact Support Workers. There is currently a pool of 5 Relief Contact Support Workers to support with the flow of work and cover emergencies. The workers are assigned to a particular area, although as a countywide service there are times when flexibility is required to cover contacts. The CSM post will be disestablished from 1st April 2019, and the Service managed by the CSM Residential.

Training

16. It is a specification of the job description that children's contact workers hold a Level 3 City and Guilds Diploma in Children and Young People's Workforce. All workers are suitably qualified. A service user evaluation project is currently underway, which will provide further information and learning to continuously improve the Service.

Systems

17. The service has changed from OneSpace to SharePoint to operate the Contact Plans, providing further detail which is useful for the workers undertaking contact and to further collate data.
18. Mosaic enables the supervised contact record to be updated as well as a review process trigger.

Other Options Considered

19. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

20. The report provides an opportunity for the Committee to consider any further actions arising from the information contained within the report.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

22. There are no financial implications arising from the report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Committee considers whether there are any actions it requires in relation to the information contained in the report.

Steve Edwards
Service Director, Youth, Families and Social Work

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Denise Martin
Children's Service Manager, Contact Service
T: 01623 433433
E: denise.martin@nottsgov.uk

Constitutional Comments (AK 18/02/19)

23. The recommendation falls within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee under their terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SAS 21/02/19)

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

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C1224