

**18<sup>th</sup> January 2021****Agenda Item: 6****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 where risks remain high and there is no suitable alternative.
  8. There are Nottinghamshire Looked After Children placed across 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, with 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. During this year's Covid 19 pandemic indirect contact by way of audio and video calling and video exchanges has been introduced to ensure that the requested level of contact between children and their families can be maintained.
  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. This has been paramount during the pandemic.
  - 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
  - using the Council's own venues has avoided the potential disruption to service as a result of venue closures and limited access restrictions during the pandemic.

## **North:**

**Ollerton Contact Centre** – based on the Dukeries Academy School site. This venue continues to work well for all ages; there are two large contact rooms, a small team office and a kitchen area. There is no outdoor play space available at this venue. Due to the venue being on a school site higher risk contacts are typically not undertaken here. Wellbeck House has been used as an overspill to the centre and when the building is closed (typically between Christmas and New Year). During the Covid 19 pandemic this has not been the case due to restrictions in place in relation to the public accessing Council buildings. A service level agreement is in place for the use of this area.

**Worksop – Priory Contact Centre** – this is a development of three individual bungalows and has a total of eight contact rooms (only four of these are in use during the pandemic on the advice of health and safety) there are three kitchens attached to larger contact rooms, a team office and a smaller office space. Outdoor play areas are available. The building is appropriate for supporting assessments and can also be used for contact which requires low level supervision, but for which a private space is required. The building is situated in central Worksop and has excellent access to public transport links.

The adjacent building is currently under demolition with a proposal that a new contact centre will be built on the site which the Contact Service will then occupy.

**Retford Office at Chancery Lane** – there are three to four rooms available here but these have not been used during the pandemic due to restrictions on access to the general public within the main building. The building has limited access to toilets, no kitchen facilities for use during contacts and no outdoor play space. Work is underway on the post 16 centre in Retford to allow a change of accommodation which will be better suited to the needs of the service.

## **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 11 rooms available for contact, During the pandemic this has been reduced to eight on the advice of public health. 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 but this has not been the case during the pandemic.

## **South:**

**Beeston Central** – this venue has five rooms, kitchen facilities and an outdoor play area and is easily accessible from the tram service. During the pandemic, only three rooms have been in use to support social distancing and ventilation.

The building will be refurbished in 2021 to provide space for Social Care and Business Support. There will be two rooms available for the Contact Service for use as necessary. Beeston will be used as a satellite centre.

**Home Brewery Building** – during the pandemic this venue has not been used at all. Ordinarily there are two rooms available, one exclusively and one is a bookable room, but

priority is given to the Contact Service. It is unlikely that the Contact Service will use Sir John Robinson Way given the current Covid 19 situation and the plan to move into a permanent venue.

The plan is for the Contact Service to move into a new refurbished building in Gedling which used to be the Carlton Children's Centre. It is proposed that it will be available for use in May 2021 and will be the main base for the south team. There will be four main contact rooms, kitchen facilities and a large outdoor play area.

The centre is on a bus route from Nottingham with the bus stop at the end of the drive. The centre will be named Gedling View.

**Hawtonville Children's Centre – Newark** – there are four rooms available of varying sizes. There is an outdoor area and kitchen. During the pandemic, only three of these rooms can be used. There is a Service Level Agreement in place for the use of this area of the Children's Centre.

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. During the pandemic the Service has withdrawn offers of transporting and this has proven beneficial in enabling more time to be committed to the supervision of contacts and flexibility to what can be offered.
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 3 fte Team Leaders. There is currently a pilot model for 1 fte Deputy Team Leader. This position is currently under review and a business model is to be presented for this to become permanent.
16. The service has 23.5 fte Contact Support Workers. There is currently a pool of 3 Relief Contact Support Workers to support with the flow of work and cover any emergencies. The workers are assigned to a particular area, although as a countywide service there are times when flexibility is required to cover contacts.

## **Training**

17. It is a specification of the job description that children's contact workers hold a Level 3 City and Guilds Diploma or equivalent in Children and Young People's Workforce. All workers are suitably qualified. All Contact Support Workers and Team Leaders have completed the Grow wise programme and this is offered to new employees as part of their induction. An ongoing training programme is available to all workers and is reviewed as part of the EPDR process.

## **Systems**

18. The Service is currently working with a project manager for environment and resources to develop scheduling software through TotalMobile. This is as a result of the SharePoint system not being suitable to the Service's needs. In the interim period a customised version of SharePoint developed specifically for the service is being used.
19. Mosaic supports the current referral process and ongoing recording and information sharing. It is anticipated that the new TotalMobile system will work seamlessly alongside Mosaic reducing time strains on workers and team leaders.

## **Other Options Considered**

20. No other options have been considered.

## **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

21. 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**

22. 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**

23. 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**  
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### **Constitutional Comments (AK 16/12/20)**

24. This report falls within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

### **Financial Comments (SAS 11/12/20)**

25. 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.

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