

**13 March 2017**

**Agenda Item: 6**

## **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 the supervision of contact for looked after children.

#### **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 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 now 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. **Core Offer**
  - 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 provides an average (from data January – December 2016) of 678 contacts per month, or 169 per week, which is a small reduction on the previous year.

The County is split into three areas; north, central and south districts. North covers Retford / Worksop /Ollerton; Central covers Mansfield and Ashfield, and South covers Broxtowe, Rushcliffe, Gedling and Newark.

From April 2016 – January 2017 the number of supervised contacts were split across the county as:

- Central 1785 – Supervised Contacts
- North 1317 – Supervised Contacts
- South 1069 – Supervised Contacts

Over the previous year 44% of the children who have supervised contact are 4 years and under and 56% of children are 5 years and older.

## 8. Venues

We have 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 are a total of four rooms, which includes a recently adapted kitchen area which works well for older children. There is a service level agreement with the School and we pay a charge for the costs. No high risk contacts take place here, they would take place at Welbeck House, Ollerton.

**Worksop – Priory Contact Centre** – This has a total of six rooms suitable for all ages, and an outdoor play area. There are two kitchens which allow for activities similar to those 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. There will shortly be some major building work, which will cause disruption but may result in better use of the building longer term. This venue is used for higher risk contacts.

#### **Central:**

**Sandy Bank** – This is considered as the central base of the Contact Service, as this is where the managers and business support officers are based. The team leaders do 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.

**Sir John Robinson Way** – One room is available at all times and following current building work it is hoped to have the use of a second, larger room. 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, especially after school.

**Hawtonville – Newark** – There are four rooms available here, an outdoor area and kitchen. These rooms are fully utilised.

### **9. Transport**

It is now embedded 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.

### **10. Staffing**

The establishment is: 0.5 f.t.e. Children's Service Manager, three f.t.e Team Leaders, and 24 f.t.e. Contact Support Workers. We have a pool of seven Relief Contact Support Workers to support with the flow of work and cover emergencies. The workers are assigned to a particular area, although there is an acknowledgement that we are a countywide service and at times flexibility is required to cover contacts.

Service delivery is Monday – Friday, 8.30am – 7 pm and some occasional weekend work.

### **11. Training**

It is now a specification of the job description that children's Contact Support Workers hold a Level 3 City and Guilds Diploma in Children and Young People's Workforce. In the past year training was undertaken by those CSWs who needed this qualification.

### **12. Systems**

The supervised contact episode on Framework is being updated to remove unnecessary information and ensure that the episode contains the necessary information for reporting purposes.

Onespace is used for planning and scheduling contact and this is effective and fit for purpose.

All staff have a Lenovo Think Pad, this enables recording well within the seven days limit. Beeston and Sandy Bank now have Wi-Fi installed in the buildings which supports connectivity for staff.

### 13. **Review**

Contact arrangements are regularly revised to ensure the service maintains its core offer and that this offer meets the needs of children and families.

### **Other Options Considered**

14. The report is for noting only.

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

15. The report is for noting only.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

16. 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 Sub-Committee notes the contents of the report.

**Steve Edwards**  
**Service Director, Children's Social Care**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact:**

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### **Constitutional Comments**

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

## **Financial Comments (TMR 14/02/17)**

18. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

## **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Contact Service Annual Data Report.

## **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All

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