

7 March 2016

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

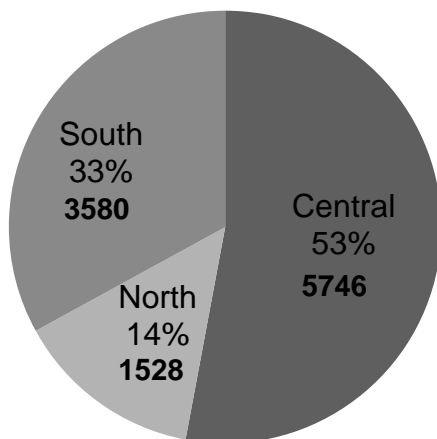
2. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide and promote contact – unless it is not in the best interests of the child.
3. The primary law and key reference documents emphasise the need for the child to be at the centre of planning contact arrangements. The Children Act 1989 and case law (decisions 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

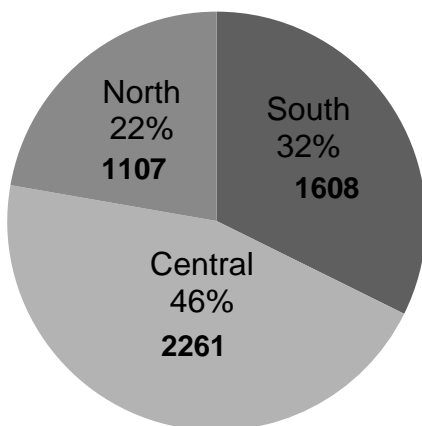
6. The Contact Service 'Core offer' is to 'provide supervised contact to children and young people who are looked after by the local authority to inform their permanency plan until this is agreed'.
7. Priority will be given to cases within the court arena and where there is a requirement to provide evidence to the proceedings.

8. Contact will be 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.
9. The Contact Service provides an average of 794 contacts per month, or 185 per week, which is a small reduction on volume compared with 2014-15.

Contacts by District 2014-2015



Contacts by District 2015-2016 (inclusive of April-Sept only)



Venues

10. 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
11. The County is split into three areas: North, Central and South districts

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 recently adapted kitchen area which works well for older children. A Contact Support Worker works 18.5 hours over five afternoons to meet demand for after school contact.

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 in a home setting, and is 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. Again, a Contact Support Worker works afternoons only.

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.

Central:

Sandy Bank – has 10 rooms available for contact, and three workers whose hours are afternoon only to meet demand. There are kitchen facilities and outdoor play areas, and the centre continues to be well used.

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. Staff in the South travel between venues which entails a high level of planning.

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.

Transport

12. 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.

Training

13. Training has recently been facilitated for Bassetlaw carers and it is planned to roll this out to all carers.
14. It is now a specification of the job role that children's contact workers hold a Level 3 City and Guilds Diploma in Children and Young People's Workforce. Training has recently started for all staff who do not have this.

Systems

15. The supervised contact episode is being updated to remove unnecessary information, and ensure that episode contains the necessary information for reporting purposes.
16. Onespace is used for planning and scheduling contact and this is effective and fit for purpose.
17. All staff have a Lenovo Think Pad which enables recording well within the seven days limit. Beeston and Sandybank now have Wi-Fi installed in the buildings which supports connectivity for staff.

Review

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

Other Options Considered

19. The report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

20. The report is for noting only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. 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

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

Financial Comments (SS 17/02/16)

23. 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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