



Financial Year	2017/18
Proposal no.	CS-2017-308
Directorate	Children's Services

Savings Programme Pre-consultation Report

Subject: *Remodel and Review the Contact Service*

1 Recommendations

1.1 Members are requested to consider the proposal to:

Remodel and Review the delivery of the Contact Service to provide £70k saving on the current budget.

Reason for recommendation

1.2. The Contact Service has been significantly reduced over the last 2 years by £150,000, reflecting a reduction in the number of cared for children and a change in the service approach to providing contact arrangements.

Further reduction of the service in its current form would have a significant impact on children and families, therefore it is proposed to review and remodel the service in order to examine whether further savings can be achieved.

2 Background

2.1 There is a statutory responsibility placed on local authorities (under Section 34 Children Act 1989) to allow “reasonable contact” between children in care and their families. Under Schedule 2 of the Children Act 1989, the local authority must “endeavour to promote contact” with parents, relatives and others for all looked after children unless this is not “reasonably practicable or consistent with [the child's] welfare” (schedule 2, paragraph 15, Children Act 1989). However, how the contact is supervised and facilitated is at the discretion of the Local Authority.

Contact is a key area of focus in Court Care Plans and in determining permanence for children and young people. The contact service is responsible for co-ordinating and supervising contact between children looked after and their birth family in line with their contact plan. The current budget for the contact service predominantly covers staffing costs, 1 centre manager, and 9.3 full time equivalent contact officers.

2.2 The increased focus on permanency planning for looked after children and the introduction of the reviewed Rochdale Contact Policy and Guidance in September 2014 has seen changes and improvements in the core offer of the contacts service for example, the introduction of facilitated contact, baby sessions and more focused assessments of need/risk. However, there are still a high number of children in permanent or long-term placements who are having their contact sessions supervised by the contact service

2.3 Through a review of the contact service, there is an opportunity to review the service requirements, needs and demands to see whether any further savings can be made; without compromising the effectiveness of the service and/or breach of statutory requirements for those cases that are in the formal Court arena.

2.4 To achieve further savings, the core offer of the contact service will need to change so that supervised contact is only provided by council contact officers for those for whom no other form of contact is appropriate. By increasing facilitated contact, for example, for those children who are in long-term placements, this could reduce further the demand on the contact service. To achieve this, foster carers, residential staff and extended family members would need to accept and take a much more active role in delivering contact.

3 Financial Implications

3.1 The saving proposal is 20% of the total budget for the area of service affected.

Table 1 provides details of the proposed savings that could be achieved through a remodel of the contact service and further reduction in staffing

	Savings 2017/18		Savings 2018/19		Total savings	
	£k		£k		£k	
	On-going	One off	On-going	One off	On-going	One off
Employees	70				70	
Other Costs						
Income lost						
Net savings	70				70	
Additional income generated						
Total savings	70				70	
Implementation costs						
Total savings less implementation costs	70				70	

4 Asset implications

4.1 There are no anticipated asset implications at this stage.

5 Voluntary Sector impact

5.1 There are no Voluntary Sector impacts arising from this report.

6 Consultation

6.1 It is proposed consultation will be undertaken with the following groups:

1. Public consultation as part of the wider council consultation process.
2. Contact Service
3. Children's Social Care staff
4. Foster carers
5. Listen up group of looked after children

6.2 It is proposed that consultation with groups 1 and 2 will be via the council's established consultation process and group 3 – 6 will be achieved through a direct methodology such as workshops and in writing.

6.3 Due to the potential staff implications there will be a requirement to undertake formal consultation as agreed within the Council's policy and procedures with trade unions and delegated decisions, following consultation with key stakeholders.

6.4 The Council must ensure that it remains open-minded throughout the consultation period to all alternative proposals and expressions of interest.

7 Alternatives considered

7.1 Members could decide not to take the proposal forward and identify alternative savings proposals

7.2 The current budget for the contact service is predominantly staffing. As part of the savings proposal for 2016/2017 consideration was given to commissioning the Contact Service to an external provider, but this was not progressed as it was agreed that there would be insufficient savings for the increased risk to service delivery.

8 Risk Assessment Implications

8.1 The Local Authority has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989 to promote contact between children who are looked after and their families. Currently, a large percentage of planned contact sessions are organised and supervised by the contact service, providing a level of consistency both in terms of venue and contact supervisor; providing a centre of expertise.

8.3 There is a risk that the contact service will not be able to be delivered to the required standard within the reduced budget and/or respond to the changing demand and expectations from the court and more importantly the children and young people that access the service. This could result in more contacts having to be supervised by social workers on a regular basis for example, alongside other core statutory duties.

8.4 Over the past two years there have been a number of efficiencies achieved and improvements in practice standards and expectations, with further potential developments identified to facilitate and embed life-story work for example, with

children with a potential care plan of adoption; as contact is the one arena where parents continue to attend routinely. Without a significant reduction in demand through changes to the core offer of the contact service any future developments are likely to be stifled and the service less effective.

- 8.5 There is also a significant risk that children, families, foster carers and staff will be opposed to any significant changes. This risk could be mitigated by ensuring full engagement and consultation on the potential options available.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Whilst there is a duty on the Local Authority to allow “reasonable contact” between children in care and their families, the Children Act 1989 does not stipulate and/or place a duty on the Local Authority to provide the service in a particular manner.

10 Personnel Implications

- 10.1 Subject to any final decisions on the service delivery element of the proposals outlined within this report there may be personnel implications for the council’s workforce and this consultation with the workforce will be undertaken in accordance with council’s Personnel Policy Framework.

11 Equalities Impacts

Workforce Equality Impacts Assessment

- 11.1 The Council will undertake a Corporate Workforce Equality Impact Assessment based on those employees identified at risk of redundancy at the start of formal consultation which will commence in November 2016 and this will be reviewed against the current workforce profile.

Equality/Community Impact Assessments

- 11.2 There are equality/community issues arising from this report. More detail can be found in the Equality Impact Assessment in Appendix 1.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR SAVINGS PROPOSALS

1. Please state the name of the officers leading the EIA
XXXXX XXXXXXXXX
2. Who has been involved in undertaking this assessment?
XXXXX XXXXXXXXX
The proposed groups once approval for the savings proposal has been given would be:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contact Service• Residential staff• Social workers• Foster carers• Listen up group of Cared 4 Children•
3. What is the scope of this assessment?
This assessment considers any impact the potential review of the contact service may have for cared for children and their families, accessing the service
4 a). What does the function currently do?
b). Describe the needs which this service meets?
The local authority has a duty to allow “reasonable contact” between children in care and their families and must “endeavour to promote contact” with parents, relatives and others for looked after children unless this is not “reasonably practicable or consistent with [the child’s] welfare”.
The contact service is responsible for co-ordinating and supervising contact between a cared for child and their birth family in line with their contact plan. Following the implementation of the new contact guidance and policy in June 2014, changes have been made to the contact service to provide a range of contact options from fully supervised to facilitated contact sessions; resulting in contact plans being more tailored to the child’s needs and providing greater flexibility to try to manage the high demand on the service as a whole.

5. What proposed changes do you wish to make?

It is proposed that the contact service is reviewed in view of any savings that can be achieved.

6. Who are the key stakeholders who may be affected by the proposed changes?

- Young people: Cared 4 Children (C4C)
- Parents/Carers of Cared 4 Children
- Contact Service Staff
- Residential staff
- Social workers
- Foster carers

7. What impact will this proposal have on all the protected groups?

The contact needs of Cared for Children are based on the individual child's care plan which must take into account issues of equality and diversity.

The duty will remain on the local authority to provide contact that is consistent with the child's care plan. Subject to the outcome of the review, the consistency of worker, location and facilities could change impacting on the child, parents/carer and foster carer and potentially resulting in them having to travel further in order to access the contact session.

This will be mitigated against through ensuring that key stakeholders are fully consulted and that there is an effective transition process.

Race Equality

All Children Looked After will continue to have a contact plan, which will be subject to a review.

The proposals do not impact negatively on this group.

Disabled People

All Children Looked After will continue to have a contact plan, which will be subject to a review.

The proposals do not impact negatively on this group.

Carers

All Cared for Children will continue to have a contact plan, which will be available to the carers and which will be subject to statutory review.

Depending on the resources available, it may result in carers having to travel further to access the contact service. This will be mitigated by ensuring that foster carers are fully consulted and that there is an effective transition process in place.

Gender
All Cared for Children will continue to have a contact plan, which will be subject to statutory review. Children of both sexes access the service currently and the proposed changes should not impact negatively upon this based on gender.
Age
All Cared for Children will continue to have a contact plan, which will be subject to a review. Children of all ages access the service currently and the proposed changes should not impact negatively upon this based on age.
Armed Forces and Ex-Armed Forces Personnel
There is no noted impact to this group.
Religion or Belief
The proposals do not impact negatively on this group. The contact service facilitates contact for children and families from diverse backgrounds, taking into account religious and cultural beliefs. It will be a requirement of the contact service moving forward to be able to continue to meet this area of need.
Sexual Orientation
The proposals do not impact negatively on this group.
Gender Reassignment
The proposals do not impact negatively on this group
Pregnant Women or Those on Maternity Leave or Those who have given Birth in the Previous 26 weeks
The proposals do not impact negatively on this group.
Marriage or Civil Partnership
The proposals do not impact negatively on this group.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

What are the main conclusions and recommendations from this analysis?

The proposal aims to ensure that the contact service offers RBC the best value for money without compromising the service to our cared for children and their families. A service specification will be drafted detailing the on-going requirements of the contact service in view of any savings that can be made.

There is a risk that any further savings could result in disruption to our Cared for Children. However, a further Impact Assessment will need to be completed once a clear proposal has been identified.

It is recommended that the risks identified can be sufficiently mitigated for, however following a period of consultation the impact assessment should be reviewed and focus specifically on the implications of the agreed service specification.

9. In the box below please provide details of who you will consult with on the proposals, when you consult, and the methods which you will use to consult. In the box below

The Consultation and Inclusion Methodology Used

- Young people: Cared 4 Children (C4C)
- Parents/Carers of Cared 4 Children
- Contact Service Staff
- Residential staff
- Social workers
- Foster carers

Consultation will take place using a range of methodologies which will include face to face meetings such as focus groups, links to council websites and written correspondence with stakeholders.

10. Produce an action plan detailing the mitigation measures that you propose to put in place to address any adverse impacts.

Mitigation Measure	Action	Responsible Officer	Implementation Date	Review Date	Evaluation Measure
Disruption for cared 4 children	Direct consultation about options and how to achieve least impact	XXXXXX XXXXXXXXXX	By end of October	End of October	Review findings and impact
Limited venues and opportunities	Direct consultation about possible options and how to achieve least impact	XXXXXX XXXXXXXXXX	By end of October	End of October	Review findings and impact