



Proposal no.	CS015
Directorate	Children's Services
Service Name	Children's Social Care
Area of Service	

<b>Subject:</b>	Proposal to Reduce the budget for the Contact Service	<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Donna Martin
<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Children's Services		

### 1 Recommendations

Members are asked to consider:

- 1.1 Discontinuing the use of the casual contact register to cover contacts that cannot be covered within the main contact service
- 1.2 A reduction in the size of the contacts team. This is likely to be found by reducing the number of full time equivalent ... .. posts in the first year, and the same number in year 2. Removal of the post of ... .. reflecting the reduction in team size.
- 1.3 That the staffing proposals are agreed as a basis for consultation.

#### Reason for recommendation

- 1.4 Research and good practice guidance emphasises the need for each child to have an individual contact plan, which is subject to review and takes into account the changing needs of the child over time. The research also recognises that contact should only be supervised where there is an identified risk that requires the contact to be fully supervised as overcrowding a contact session can equally inhibit the enjoyment, communication and relationship-building between a parent and a child. It is expected that through the implementation of the revised Rochdale Contact Guidance, there will be extra capacity built into the contact service through the introduction of facilitated contact and through the progression of contact from fully supervised to unsupervised or facilitated by the current carer/family member; based on the child's assessed needs and over time. The staffing ratio of the contact service is based around the current number of children looked after by the local authority and is based around a model where all contacts are fully supervised on a long-term basis, without a clear review process and assessment of risk.

### 2 Background

- 2.1 There is a statutory responsibility placed on local authorities (under Section 34

Children Act 1989) of “reasonable contact between children in care and their families”. The local authority has a duty to that ensure contact between children who are looked-after 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 practical or consistent with [the child's] welfare” (schedule 2, paragraph 15, Children Act 1989).

- 2.2 The budget for the contact service predominantly covers staffing costs, 1 centre manager, 1 deputy manager, 13.3 full time equivalent contact officers and a part-time admin worker. The number of full time equivalent contact officers employed within the contact service increased to 13.3 in response to the growing number of children looked after in 2012/13 and the demands on the service to fully supervise all contacts.
- 2.3 Since January 2014, the number of looked after children has reduced by 30 and is on a continuing downward trajectory. The number of children placed for adoption and the number placed with extended family members have both significantly increased. The result of this is that over the next 2 years the number of children whose contact with parents needs to be supervised by staff in the local authority will also continue to reduce.
- 2.4 With the increased focus on permanency planning for looked after children and the introduction of the reviewed Rochdale contact policy and guidance from September 2014, there is also an opportunity to re-focus and reduce demand on the contact service. To achieve this, the core offer of the contact service will 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 which can be supervised by foster carers, residential staff and extended family members, the current model of delivery will no longer be required for children in permanent or long-term placement.
- 2.5 Of the 7055 contacts supervised from April 2013 to March 2014, approx. 15% were for children subject to full care orders, with the biggest demand within the 8 – 10 age brackets; which are likely to be children who are placed in kinship placements or with long-term foster carers. If these contact were resourced differently an equivalent reduction in staffing could be made within the contact service within the first year, with a similar saving in future years in line with the forecast reduction in the looked after children population.
- 2.6 The average number of contact officers within our statistical neighbours is 12 full time equivalent contact officers; covering approx. 10% more contacts per month, which equates to approximately 1 FTE, depending on whether the contact is fully supervised and/or facilitated.

### **Alternatives considered**

- 2.7 Members could decide not to take the proposal forward and identify alternative saving proposals.

### **3 Financial Implications**

- 3.1 The saving proposal is 32% of the total budget for the area of service affected.

Table 1 provides details of the savings can be made through reduction of the size of the contact team by ..... in 15/16 and 16/17 and a reduction in the budget previously used for casual contract provision by an independent provider as contact demands reduce.

	Savings 2015/16 £k		Savings 2016/17 £k		Total savings £k	
	On- going	One off	On- going	One off	On- going	One off
Employees	86		50		136	
Other Costs	14				14	
Income lost						
<b>Net savings</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>150</b>	
Additional income generated						
<b>Total savings</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>150</b>	
Implementation costs						
<b>Total savings less implementation costs</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>150</b>	

### Financial and potential staffing impact on another service

3.2 This would not have any impact on other services.

### Voluntary Sector financial impact

3.3 There is potential impact on the voluntary sector if such an organisation has previously been commissioned to provide casual contact services because the amount of services purchased externally will reduce.

### Asset implications

3.4 There are no anticipated asset implications at this stage.

## 4 Legal Implications

4.1 As mentioned in 2.1 above, the 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 all looked after children unless this is not “reasonably practicable or consistent with the child's welfare”.

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

4.3 The proposal has potential redundancy law implications.

## 5 Personnel Implications

5.1 The proposals within this report will have staffing implications and as a consequence

employees will be placed at risk of redundancy and support will be provided in accordance with the Personnel Policy Framework. Formal workforce consultation will be undertaken.

### **6 Risk Assessment Implications**

- 6.1 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 the majority of planned contact sessions are organized and supervised by the contact service, providing a level of consistency in terms of venue and contact supervisor.
- 6.2 Whilst it is anticipated that the introduction of the revised contact policy and guidance and greater emphasis on securing permanency for children will reduce some of the demand on the contact service, the proposed reduction in contact officers and the removal of the casual register, could result in an increase in demand pressures at periods of high demand such as during the school holiday periods,. This can in some cases be mitigated by social workers, foster carers and residential staff providing support to enable contact to take place in more appropriate and natural environments for the child.

### **7 Equalities Impacts**

#### **Workforce Equality Impacts Assessment**

- 7.1 This proposal will have staffing implications and will be included in a full equalities impact assessment to be undertaken on the employees within the at risk groups of staff. This analysis will be reported separately to Members when the at risk cohort of staff identified.

#### **Equality/Community Impact Assessments**

- 7.2 There are no *significant* equality/community issues arising from this report. The contact needs of looked after children are based on the individual child's care plan which must take into account issues of equality and diversity.

### **8 Consultation**

- 8.1 There will be a requirement to undertake consultations with Trade Unions and staff in accordance with statutory requirements as required within the agreed efficiencies
- 8.2 In relation to the changes in the contact policy, consultation will also take place with the following:
- Residential staff
  - Social workers
  - Foster carers
  - Listen up group of looked after children
  - Corporate Parents Board

### Appendix 1

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR SAVINGS PROPOSALS

<b>1. Please state the name of the officers leading the EIA</b>
Helen Delamare, Head of Service CP and Court Proceedings
<b>2. Who has been involved in undertaking this assessment e.g. list the stakeholder groups which have been involved?</b>
None to date. The proposed groups once approval for the savings proposal has been given would be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contact Service</li><li>• Residential staff</li><li>• Social workers</li><li>• Foster carers</li><li>• Listen up group of looked after children</li><li>• Corporate Parents Board</li></ul>
<b>3. What is the scope of this assessment?</b>
With the increased focus on permanency planning for looked after children and the proposed introduction of the reviewed Rochdale Contact Policy and Guidance from September 2014 there is the opportunity to re-focus and reduce demand on the contact service, resulting in savings being made through the reduction of contact officers employed within the service.  This EIA aims to assess the potential equality impact of the proposal to reduce the number of contact officers within the contact service.
<b>4 a). What does the function currently do?</b> <b>b). Describe the needs which this service meets?</b>
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 looked after child and their birth family in line with their contact plan. Predominantly all contacts covered by the contact service are fully supervised, irrespective of the child’s age and presenting risks.
<b>5. What proposed changes do you wish to make?</b>
A reduction in the size of the contacts team. This is likely to be found by reducing the number of ... .. posts in the first year, and the same number in year 2.  Removal of the post of ... .. reflecting the reduction in team size

To achieve this, the core offer of the contact service will 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 which can be supervised by foster carers, residential staff and extended family members, the current model of delivery will no longer be required for children in permanent or long-term placement.

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

- Young people: Looked After Children (LAC)
- Parents/Carers
- Contact Service
- Residential staff
- Social workers
- Foster carers

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

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

There are currently 247 looked after children who are having contact supervised with their siblings or birth parents via the contact service. A review of their contact plans is likely to result in some of these children moving to facilitated contact (if assessed appropriate), which will need to be managed carefully, but in the long-term should reduce the increased demand for example during the school holiday period and result in contact being more tailored to the presenting needs of the child.

The duty will remain on the local authority to provide contact as per the child's care plan irrespective of the resources available within the contact service, which could result in the child having inconsistent contact supervisor and resulting in a greater demand on the child care social work teams.

### **Race Equality**

There is an under representation of children' from minority ethnic groups. Notwithstanding this, it is not envisaged there will be any negative impact on this group of children/young people because the proposal is not seeking to change referral/access points; rather the integration of service delivery.

The integration of services may improve the skills and knowledge of staff in responding to the needs for children from ethnic minority groups. This would be due to closer working/management and supervisory arrangements. In the event there is a specific need identified within the assessment undertaken, arrangements would be made to ensure the service provision is sensitive to any identified race equality issues.

### **Disabled People**

As service users will still be able to access services via existing and established pathways there will be no adverse impact on this group from the proposals. In the event there is a specific need identified within the assessment undertaken, arrangements would be made to ensure the service provision is sensitive to any identified disability.

<b>Carers</b>
<p>All Looked After Children will continue to have a contact plan, which will be subject to statutory review.</p> <p>More responsibility will be placed on local authority foster carers and family and friends carer to promote and supervise contact between a child in their care and their birth family in line with the social work assessment and proposed contact plan. This will be mitigated by ensuring an effective transition process is in place through the introduction of facilitated contact, which carers will be able to attend initially alongside the contact officers and through involving the carers in the assessment process.</p>
<b>Gender</b>
<p>All Looked After Children will continue to have a contact plan, which will be subject to statutory review. There are currently 131 boys and 116 girls receiving a service.</p> <p>The proposals do not impact negatively on this group based on gender.</p>
<b>Age</b>
<p>All Looked After Children will continue to have a contact plan, which will be subject to a review.</p> <p>The breakdown of the current looked after children receiving a service is: –</p> <p>pre-school - 25%</p> <p>5-12 – 60%</p> <p>13+ - 15%</p> <p>The proposed changes within the contact guidance and policy and subsequent reduction in contact officers is likely to have a greater impact on the older age ranges. The introduction of facilitated contact (where assessed appropriate) will result in contact plans being better tailored to the child's needs and identified risk factors. However, these groups of children currently contribute to the high demand during school holidays and if the demand on the contact service through facilitated contact and an overall reduction in the LAC population is not achieved as anticipated or in line with the reduction in contact officer posts, it could result in their contacts being managed on an adhoc basis by different workers, which could be difficult for all concerned and would need to be kept subject to review.</p>
<b>Armed Forces and Ex-Armed Forces Personnel</b>
<p>All Looked After Children will continue to have a contact plan, which will be subject to a review.</p> <p>The proposals do not impact negatively on this group.</p>
<b>Religion or Belief</b>

The proposals do not impact negatively on this group.
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>
The proposals do not impact negatively on this group.
<b>Gender Reassignment</b>
The proposals do not impact negatively on this group.
<b>Pregnant Women or Those on Maternity Leave or Those who have given Birth in the Previous 26 weeks</b>
The proposals do not impact negatively on this group.
<b>Marriage or Civil Partnership</b>
The proposals do not impact negatively on this group.
<b>8. Conclusions and Recommendations</b>
<b>What are the main conclusions from this analysis?</b>
<p>There are no <i>significant</i> equality/community issues arising from the proposed changes. The Local Authority has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989 to promote contact between children who are looked after and their families.</p> <p>It is proposed that each looked after child (LAC) will have an individual contact plan which must take into account issues of equality and diversity and which will be subject to regular review as part of the statutory review process.</p> <p>Currently the majority of planned contact sessions are organized and supervised by the contact service, providing a level of consistency to the looked after child in terms of venue and contact supervisor. The proposed reduction in contact officers within the service is based on an anticipated reduction in demand on the service following the implementation of the revised contact policy and guidance and greater emphasis on securing permanency for children; which should see a reduction in the LAC population.</p> <p>There is a potential impact on looked after children should the reduction in contact demand not be achieved in the timeframe anticipated in terms of there being less flexibility within the service to respond to new referrals and/or vary contact arrangements, resulting in a greater demand being placed on the social work teams to cover contact sessions at short notice. This could in some cases be mitigated by social workers, foster carers and residential staff providing support in a planned way, to enable contact to take place in more appropriate and natural environments for the child; outside of the contact service.</p>
<b>What are your recommendations?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The revised contact guidance and policy is implemented to enable the new structure to be embedded prior to the proposed reduction in staffing.</li> <li>• Transition from fully supervised contact to facilitated contact to be managed and supported</li> </ul>



across the stakeholders through consultation and a series of discussions.

What evidence do you have which demonstrates that these measures will be effective?

A review of the contact service and supplementary guidance and policy has identified a new model of working which should reduce the current demand on the contact service.

**9. Please provide details of who you will consult with on the proposals and the methods which you will use to consult. State your consultation and inclusion methodology.**

***Consultation and Inclusion Methodology Used***

Consultation and a series of discussions will commence as soon as CSC is able to with the identified stakeholders, to ensure that the Local Authority continues to meet its statutory duties.

**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	End Date	Status
3. Embed revised contact guidance and policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commence consultation and discussions with identified stakeholders regarding the proposed changes and their potential future roles in managing contact.</li> <li>• Implement new model within the contact service, including facilitated contact</li> <li>• Update contact plans for all looked after children.</li> <li>• Monitor how the new policy is working and impact on service delivery, demand on the contact service and wider CSC.</li> </ul>	Helen Delamare	Dec 2014	