

Summary Sheet

Council Report

Title Review of arrangements and approach to children maintaining relationships with their families

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan? Key decision – Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report – Mel Meggs

Report Author(s) Sharon Sandell – Service Manager Leaving Care and Contact Service

Ward(s) Affected All

Recommendations:

To approve direction of travel and policy for children seeing their families

To approve new job profile and initiation of consultation to move staff across.

To approve further scoping works to determine costs to refurbish Grafton House and the Cranworth Centre

To agree return of contact houses to RMBC General Needs subject to sourcing alternative space via Children's Centre reorganisation/re-designation and while refurbishment works are being undertaken at Cranworth/Grafton.

That RMBC no longer uses the word contact to describe the arrangements for children and young people seeing their families

That RMBC changes the name of the Cranworth Centre to the 'Family Activity Base'

That RMBC changes the name of the team to 'Family Activity Base workers.'

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 – Policy

Appendix 2 – Job Profile

Appendix 3 – Finance Policy

Background Papers None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel No

Council Approval Required Yes

Exempt from the Press and Public Yes

1. Background

- 1.1 The team responsible for supervising the time children see their families has been known as the contact team. The team until July 2017 was dispersed into social work teams. From July 2017 the team was provided with their own centre – the Cranworth Centre.
- 1.2 The Cranworth Centre is based in Eastwood and was formerly the home for the Family Assessment Team.
- 1.3 Some residual works have been completed on the centre but a number of issues remain to make it a warm, welcoming and child friendly environment for families to spend time together.
- 1.4 Alongside the more formal establishment of the team the authority has seen a significant rise in the numbers of looked after children. It has also seen the team become too small to cover all the sessions required.
- 1.5 OFSTED completed their inspection in 2017 and social workers reported their concerns as to the numbers of sessions they were supervising as a result of these pressures.
- 1.6 Gathering voices as to the standard of accommodation offered to families seeing their children were becoming louder. There were concerns that while the Cranworth Centre provided space it did not necessarily provide the optimum conditions which allowed children to see their families in a warm, safe and child friendly environment.
- 1.7 There were also concerns that the levels of communication between social workers and contact service not being coherent or clear enough which, in some cases, meant children were not as supported as they could be as messages were missed or miscommunicated.
- 1.8 Of significant concern was the extent to which the team transport children to and from sessions. Analysis showed that in at least 80% of cases contact workers were collecting children from school or placement. This equates to one worker operating as a taxi driver for 8 days each month.
- 1.9 A review of how RMBC CYPS provides time and space to families was requested by Mel Meggs in February 2018.

- 1.10 The group formed to review arrangements consisted of Service Managers from across CYPS, Legal Services, PLO Manager, LAC Council Participation Worker, Principal Social Worker and the Manager of the Contact Team. This group initially met fortnightly but from May has met monthly.
- 1.11 This group believed the scope of the review should cover the whole process from the point at which decisions are being formulated and considered to remove children through to how services record and use the time children spend with their families to build memories and support parents/adults in their parenting.
- 1.12 There has been a sub group to explore buildings and environments which includes representation from CYPS Building Management, RMBC Buildings and Maintenance as well as customer care. This group has meet 4 times.
- 1.13 A further sub group has been established by the Service Manager of the Fostering Service to explore how foster carers can be further encouraged to take responsibility for bringing children to and from the time spent seeing their families. This group has met once.
- 1.14 The aim of the approach has been to provide children and young people the opportunity to maintain relationships with their families in as safe a way as possible and which promotes the sense of belonging and identity for children to their birth family.
- 1.15 A significant element of this was to rename the centre and the team.

2 Renaming Contact

- 2.1 The LAC Council has met and have requested the Contact Service have a name change. LAC Council have requested the Contact Service now be called The Family Activity Base Team (FAB Team) and the Contact Centre be known as Family Activity Base (FAB). The young people liked the idea of being able to say to their friends that they were 'going to FAB'.
- 2.2 The idea was taken to families who use the Cranworth Centre (where the majority of contacts take place) to ascertain their views. The families overwhelmingly accepted the new title.

3. Policy for Children and young people seeing their families.

- 3.1 Young people leaving care often say they are lonely. They have lost friends and family during their time as a looked after child and when they move on to independence and adulthood they feel lonely.
- 3.2 There is also evidence to suggest that young people leaving the care of the LA struggle to know who they are, or what has led them into care and to leave care. Some ask to see their records but in many cases this does not answer questions about who they were as children or the detail of how they interacted with their families as children. One young man reported that he has no sense of what he was like as a little boy from reading his records.

- 3.3 One of the key priorities for this review was to try and address part of this by creating opportunities to offer a rationale and a story for the child as they move through care and into adulthood by placing arrangements for children and families seeing their families in a more prominent position at the heart of decision making.
- 3.4 Part of this was developing a comprehensive document which underpins RMBC CYPS approach to how decisions are made for children to maintain a relationship with their families and how these decisions are recorded and activities noted in ways which help both future care planning decisions but also for young people to read about their relationships with their families in a more meaningful way.

The document is attached in Appendix 1

- 3.5 The policy starts at the point at which decisions are made about children coming into the care of the Local Authority at Legal Gateway Planning Meetings. Arrangements for children maintaining relationships with those people who are important to them are key to their present and future sense of who they are, as such the rationale from their corporate parent has to be clear and rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the worries as well as research and understanding of the importance of relationships and identity for children and they age and grow within the looked after system.
- 3.6 The policy expects this process to be scrutinised during PLO Panel where workers must evidence a clear rationale and approach to thinking about how relationships are maintained and to what level. Too often there is a lack of consideration for the detail with a default to 3 times a week for 90 mins. The new policy seeks to address this position.
- 3.7 The policy also expects closer working relationships between the FAB Team, the family and Social Workers. This will be by way of a set up meeting to establish expectations which all parties to the arrangement are aware of and agree. The arrangements will be reviewed regularly – frequency of which will be agreed at the first meeting. This enables workers to keep track of arrangements and to make sure they are a positive experience for child and their family.
- 3.8 Family will also have a leaflet to keep which they will be provided with at the beginning of their relationship with the service. As well as having contact numbers it will be a reminder of what to expect from the service and what the service expects from families using the service.
- 3.9 The policy also looks at the role and responsibilities of the FAB worker. Through discussions with the team and review members there was a recognition that the current job profile was not fit for purpose and did not reflect current role or future role to ensure compliance to proposed policy.

The new job profile is attached in appendix 2. It has been subject to grading and continues to attract a Band E salary.

- 3.10 The new profile acknowledges that the team will offer input to support the development of life story work, helping families build memories together through the use of photos and pictures. They will also be able to offer parenting advice and offer to model positive parenting behaviours. It also acknowledges the reality that at times the team can be called to court to give evidence as to their observations.
- 3.11 A significant part of the policy has been about changing the way the service writes and talks about the time children see their families. A significant element is how workers record the sessions. The policy seeks to alter the recording form so it becomes a narrative of the time together as opposed to completing a series of boxes which look for behaviours and issues.
- 3.12 As part of the policy LAC Council have been consulted about arrangements for seeing their families. In response to their views the policy now supports the possibility for children and young people to read what has been written. It also offers the opportunity for children and young people to say how they feel about the time spent with their families.
- 3.13 This revised recording arrangement has been trialled within the service and examples have been shared with the review group. The examples offer a greater sense of the time spent together.
- 3.14 The new policy is due to be launched at the Whole Service Event in September and will be supported by Robin Sen (University of Sheffield) who will deliver a key note speech which supports the new ethos and philosophy of RMBC CYPS approach for children maintaining relationships with their families.
- 3.15 The review has also looked at the financial support offered to families to support attendance and active participation when they see their children. The policy was drawn up in response to a concern of inconsistent messages from across the service in relation to the monies being offered to support children seeing their families.

Family Activity Base Finance Policy is appendix 3

4. Training and Development of Teams.

- 4.1 The policy seeks to alter the way the wider service views, arranges and supervises the time children see their families. As such a training and briefing schedule will be developed to support. This will start at the official launch of the new service and policy at the Whole Service Event in September 2018.
- 4.2 The FAB Team has had little formal training over the years, as such the training plan is significant but necessary to make sure the team have a strong baseline knowledge upon which to take the service to its next phase.

- 4.3 This will include some focussed training on life story/building memories as well as input from the dominant parenting approach delivered via Early Help. This will help workers offer consistent parenting messages to families as part of being a role model during sessions.
- 4.4 Briefings will be delivered to social workers to support their understanding of expectations as well as guidance to support social workers complete the requests for LGPM and PLO panel with the necessary depth and analysis so that these secure appropriate and safe arrangements for children maintaining relationships with their families.
- 4.5 Embedding the expectations and commitment will require significant effort and high levels of scrutiny and oversight across the management spectrum to make sure workers are providing the necessary consideration and explanation for the approach they have taken to children maintaining links with the families.
- 4.6 Quality assurance at each level including explicit challenge around the decision making for determining frequency, length and type of arrangement. Regular review also becomes important and is made explicit in this policy. Partly to make sure the arrangement is sound and partly as a mechanism to offer opportunity to explore whether current care plan is appropriate or whether it requires revisiting.
- 4.7 A significant element of the policy offers a standardised paragraph for all care plans which makes clear the grounds in which the LA will review arrangements formally through the Courts and when decisions will be made and approved through CYPS decision making protocols.

5. Buildings and Environments

- 5.1 The service has access to a range of buildings – The Cranworth Centre in Eastwood as well as rooms in service centres at Swinton and Maltby. The Service also has 3 council houses available to support children see their families. These are at Cedric Avenue at Thurcroft, Doncaster Road in Wath and Halesbury Road in Eastwood.
- 5.2 The team is based at the Cranworth Centre in the Eastwood area of Rotherham. Formerly the Family Assessment Team base it offers a number of rooms which have been adapted for families to spend time together.
- 5.3 This centre currently offers 7 rooms.
- 5.4 Maltby also has 3 rooms specifically for children seeing their families.
- 5.5 The houses offer a number of rooms to support children seeing their families and can, at times support 2 families at any one time.
- 5.6 Occasionally the service has to source alternative space through commissioning rooms in other buildings not owned by RMBC incurring additional costs. Service is also aware children are seeing their families in meeting rooms in other service centres.

- 5.7 Head of Service LAC and Leaving Care with Acting DCS visited Cranworth and the Contact Houses on 19th April. Both were disappointed at the décor, finish and equipment available for children and their families.
- 5.8 As part of the review some initial scoping work as to how much it would cost to bring the houses up to a specification which would satisfy the ambition to offer safe, warm and welcoming spaces for children to see their families.
- 5.9 Mears offered some rough estimations alongside RMBC Buildings Services. To address current fixtures, fittings, décor and gardens alongside furniture each house would require between £15 - £20,000 to bring it to the desired specification. This would see new flooring, décor, new bathrooms, gardens becoming safe spaces to play and new furniture.
- 5.10 In discussion it is believed spending this money in this way would not be cost effective. The proposal is to return these houses back to RMBC Key Choices where they can be rented out to families in need of accommodation. However this cannot happen until additional spaces have been secured elsewhere.
- 5.11 Alternative properties have been sought. Grafton House has been identified as a possible option. This is currently undergoing survey work to determine how much this would cost to refurbish and make into a space where children can see their families.
- 5.12 Grafton House is in centre Rotherham and is in walking distance from the bus station.
- 5.13 Grafton potentially provides up to 6 or 7 rooms which would directly replace the spaces available in the houses. It is proposed that subject to approval the houses would be handed back to general needs and all arrangements would be transferred to Grafton.
- 5.14 Grafton also offers the opportunity to move the team base. This could then support increasing capacity at the Cranworth Centre to 8 or possibly 9 rooms.
- 5.15 Combined with Maltby this would offer 17 – 19 sessions per day or 85 – 95 sessions per week.
- 5.16 At the current time given the high numbers of looked after children additional space may be required but as numbers reduce over the next 18 months, Grafton and Cranworth should provide enough space for families.
- 5.17 As noted additional works will be required to bring Grafton and Cranworth up to an acceptable standard. Approximate costs to improve Cranworth but without the additional change in room configuration is expected to be in the region of £30000. However with reconfiguration and increasing rooms in the centre this will change. This estimation also includes furniture and equipment.
- 5.18 The nature of the environment also requires additional time from cleaning and caretaking staff to ensure the environment is warm, welcoming, safe and clean to welcome families. The cost of this based on current charge out rates would be £16207.00 a year. This would represent an additional cost of

£4246.00 a year. It is likely that this additional £4246 would have to come from CYPS budgets.

- 5.19 Transitional arrangements could see the transfer of arrangements from the houses to one of the children's centres which are the subject of the current Early Help review. It is expected this could become the temporary additional space for the duration of the improvement works at Grafton. This would temporarily delay the arrangements for one of the centres.
- 5.20 The centres are already configured to support children and their families so little residual work would be required to support the transition. They are not considered a long term option as they tend to be away from main centres and RMBC should be doing everything it can to support ease of access.
- 5.21 Team Manager and Service Manager to visit the possibilities on 27th July to consider whether this would be a possible option for the service.

6. Key Issues:

- 6.1 The team providing supervision are a committed and experienced group of people who want to offer much more to families. Increasingly the team and senior managers are accepting that additional capacity and resource is required to bring the service up to a standard RMBC should be providing for children for whom it is the corporate parent.
- 6.2 To be able to do this requires significant additional resource at a time where there are unprecedented budget pressures across the LA.
- 6.3 Moreover the philosophy of the policy may, at the current time be incredibly challenging to implement given the increasing pressures on social work teams to supervise children's time with their families.
- 6.4 The policy and approach expects greater challenge, it expects workers to slow down and think, not just about the risks should the child stay with their family but also how decisions made at the beginning will impact and remain with the child as they age and move through care.
- 6.5 Again these are important messages as the culture and approach to children maintaining links does need to shift but the pressures within the system with pressures placed on teams means that the time spent to think about future is missing.

7. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 7.1 RMBC could choose to implement part or all of the review recommendations.
- 7.2 RMBC may choose to implement none of the recommendations choosing to remain with the status quo. However consultation taken up to this point is that the environment, arrangements, understanding of the importance of maintaining links and well as the expectations of all those involved suggests current arrangements are not good enough and change is required.

- 7.3 RMBC can choose to not pursue the recommendations to improve the buildings or the facilities. To do so would not provide the environment needed to support the philosophy of the policy or the research underpinning what good quality family time looks like for children who are living away from their families.
- 7.4 RMBC may choose not to implement the policy to alter the approach to children seeing their families. This would mean the status quo was maintained. There are frustrations and difficulties within the current arrangements which do not offer optimum conditions for children seeing their family.
- 7.5 RMBC could choose not to pursue the ideas relating to carers transporting children to arrangements to see their families. However the policy is aimed at limiting the hand over points to strangers for children and so they build relationships and attachments to those responsible for their care.
- 7.6 RMBC may choose to not implement the revised job profile for the team and the associated training package given the banding remains the same for the post. However the current job profile does not address the expectations and range of responsibilities attached to the post. Nor does it allow for the names of the posts to change in line with the wishes of the LAC Council.
- 7.7 It is the recommendation of this report that RMBC implement all of the recommendations contained in this report as well as offer permission to cost out alterations to Cranworth and Grafton.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 Through the review group consultation has taken place with all service managers including IROs. Legal Services have also been widely consulted in the development of the new policy and have offered advice on the paragraphs relating to care planning.
- 8.2 Moving forward foster carers are to be consulted as to how RMBC supports carers taking more responsibility for transporting children to see their families where this is safe and appropriate to do so.

9. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 9.1 Policy scheduled to be launched at the Whole Service Event in September with briefings delivered into the autumn and winter.

10. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 10.1 There will be significant investment required to improve the environment in which RMBC provides spaces for children to see their families.

- 10.2 Surveys are currently being carried out on Grafton House to gain a figure for structural changes. When these are in DLT can be provided with a full costed paper as to how much full refurbishment for all houses will cost.
- 10.3 Immediate costs relate to increased hours required from cleaning/caretaking staff to ensure the centre is clean and ready for families to use. Currently the centre while clean, it is not clean enough to allow children to play on the floor, nor does it allow enough time for staff to move furniture to ensure spaces are fully hygienic. This requires an immediate £4246 per annum increase to the Contact Centre budget.

11. Legal Implications

- 11.1 Legal services have been part of the review group and have been fully involved in discussions as to changes to the arrangements for children seeing their families.

12. Human Resources Implications

- 12.1 Subject to approval the service would be seeking to consult with the team to change their job profile.
- 12.2 No discussions have taken place as yet with the team or HR until approvals have been gained.

13. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 13.1 As already noted a whole scale review and change is required to support children maintain links with their families but it also grounds them in the understanding of their futures and relationships as they get older.
- 13.2 At the current time RMBC does not offer enough scrutiny and focus to these arrangements in ways which allows confidence in the approach taken. The review and its conclusions has used research available from RiP to inform its choices and decision making alongside consultations with the LAC Council. Therefore the approach offered here is informed by research evidence and takes into account the views, wishes and feelings of children in the system as well as acknowledging the views of care leavers as they move through the system into adulthood.

14 Equalities and Human Rights Implications

- 14.1 None noted

15. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

- 15.1 None noted

16. Risks and Mitigation

16.1 See section 7

Accountable Officer(s)

Service Manager – Sharon Sandell

Head of Service Ian Walker

Approvals Obtained from:-

Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services:- Named officer

Director of Legal Services:- Named officer

Head of Procurement (if appropriate):-

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