

SUPERVISED CONTACT POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Children's Social Care



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SUPERVISED CONTACT POLICY

1 Introduction

1.1 Section 34 of the Children Act 1989 states that:

(1) Where a child is in the care of a local authority, the authority shall (subject to the provisions of this section) allow the child reasonable contact with—

(a) his parents;

(b) any guardian, or special guardian of his;

(ba) any person who by virtue of section 4A has parental responsibility for him;

(c) where there was a residence order in force with respect to the child immediately before the care order was made, the person in whose favour the order was made; and

(d) where, immediately before the care order was made, a person had care of the child by virtue of an order made in the exercise of the High Court's inherent jurisdiction with respect to children, that person.

1.2 Contact should be by agreement with the Local Authority and the child's parent(s)/relatives where possible and should only be supervised in circumstances whereby it is unsafe to do so, and supervised contact is deemed to be in the child's best interest as ordered by the court or by agreement with the parent(s)/relatives.

1.3 Supervised contact in Plymouth is provided by the Local Authority's Family Support Contact team.

1.4 The primary purpose of all contact is to promote and maintain the relationship between a child and parent/relative whilst the child is placed with alternative carers.

1.5 Supervised contact is ordered by the court or by agreement by the parent and Local Authority following a statutory assessment for the purpose of child protection and/or to assess a child's needs. It takes place when the statutory assessment has deemed it unsafe for the child to have unsupervised contact with their parent(s)/relatives.

1.6 The policy statements and procedures contained within this document set out a clear direction from the Local Authority around its legal responsibilities and provision of supervised contact. [Appendix A](#) sets out an indicative guide to contact arrangements.

2 Statutory Framework

If there is any doubt about the legal basis of a contact decision, advice must be sought from the legal panel or directly from the legal department.

2.1 Children in Care

Children Act 1989, Section 34.

2.2 Children in Need

Children Act 1989, Schedule 2 Paragraph 10(b).

2.3 The refusal, suspension or varying of a contact arrangement when made under a section 34 order.

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010, Regulation 8.

2.4 Where a child's plan is for adoption and where a placement order has been granted

Adoption and Children Act 2002, Section 26.

3 Policy Statements

Plymouth City Council's Children Social Care service expects that:

- 3.1 Children's Social Care staff apply the underlying principles in regard to contact as contained in the [Children Act 1989, Schedule 2 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002](#).
- 3.2 Full and clear records must be kept which include the reasoning and evidence underpinning the Supervised Contact Agreement.
- 3.3 All supervised contact arrangements, including all recordings, are an integral part of the overall child care planning, review and safeguarding process. Supervised contact will be reviewed every 12 weeks and must be considered as part of the child's ongoing care planning and statutory reviews.
- 3.4 The child's Social Worker must ensure that contact agreements; meet the child's needs first, is in their best interest and promotes, encourages and facilitates reasonable supervised contact between the child, their parent(s)/relatives.
- 3.5 Where it is not possible to maintain the supervised contact, and the situation remains detrimental to the child's welfare, we will make every effort to maintain some links for a child with his/her parent(s)/relatives. This may include indirect contact through the exchange of letters or information through a third party.
- 3.6 Every effort is made for children in care to maintain links with their parent(s)/relatives, paying particular attention to arrangements whereby a child may lose contact with specific aspects of their cultural heritage;
- 3.7 The Family Support Service Manager takes responsibility for implementing and monitoring this policy and procedure. This policy and procedure will be reviewed bi-annually by the Family Support Service Manager, unless there are significant changes to the statutory framework or local context, which would require an earlier review.

SUPERVISED CONTACT PROCEDURE

4 Considerations for Supervised Contact during care planning

- 4.1 Every effort must be made to have a planned contact agreement based on the needs of the child and the circumstances of the case, prior to a Court hearing. Inevitably, there will be occasions when a contact agreement needs to be drawn up quickly (i.e. when an emergency Protection Order goes before a Court), however this should be an infrequent exception. Sufficient consideration of possible plans for supervised contact must still occur in emergency circumstances.
- 4.2 The reason for supervised contact and the arrangements for recording and reporting of each session is to be carefully considered and clearly recorded in the child's care plan. Additionally, the child's Social Worker must define the purpose of the supervised contact before making any request for supervised contact with the Family Support Contact team.
- 4.3 The Local Authority recognises that there are three differing **purposes** for providing supervised contact:
- **Maintaining contact pending determination**
 - **Assessment or re-unification**
 - **Identity**
- 4.4 Supervised contact must be recorded within the child's care plan. This will then inform the specific arrangements about the nature and frequency of supervised contact.
- 4.5 Once the child's Social Worker has identified the purpose for supervised contact there will be essential factors which will need to be considered before requesting the service from the Family Support Contact team.
- child's needs,
 - birth relatives,
 - substitute carers,
 - practical considerations.

5 Requests to Family Support Contact Service

- 5.1 In all situations where supervised contact is required (i.e. Ordered by the court either planned or in an emergency or when assessed as necessary) the child's social worker is to contact the Family Support Contact team to request the service.
- 5.2 The child's Social Worker will be required to fill out a 'referral form' and a 'Contact Agreement form' and will need to complete a Risk Assessment. The Business

Support Officer will then facilitate the allocation of a Contact Supervisor and the Supervised Contact timings.

- 5.3 Where a child is accommodated on an emergency basis, immediate plans for contact must be clearly agreed and recorded in the Placement Plan. Where there is a length timeframe between referral and allocation these forms will require updating to ensure that recent and full information is provided to the Family Support Worker.
- 5.4 In the event that the contact team have insufficient capacity to meet the requested contact requirements, the Family Support Team Manager will commission appropriately trained staff from an approved provider.

6 Planning the Supervised Contact

- 6.1 It is important to distinguish between the **planning of supervised contact** which relates to the overall care planning decisions for the child; and the **management of supervised contact** which relates to the practical decisions and management of each episode of supervised contact. Details around the management of contact must be considered when identifying the purpose of the Supervised Contact (See section 4.6) and after each Supervised Contact session (See section 8.3)
- 6.2 When planning supervised contact there must be good quality consideration and analysis of the child's contact needs and how these needs can best be met. The focus of the considerations must always be the needs of the child and ensure that the supervised contact arrangements do not impede a child's right to enjoy mainstream childhood activities.
- 6.3 The views of the child about supervised contact must be sought according to their age and understanding alongside the views of the carer in order to ensure that all aspects of the child's welfare are considered.
- 6.4 There are two **types** of supervised contact:
1. **Supervised** – requires a Family Support Worker to constantly supervise the child and parent throughout the duration of the visit;
 2. **Semi – Supervised** - requires a Family Support Worker to supervise the child and parent at intervals within the duration of the visit.
- 6.5 The **frequency** of supervised contact must also be arranged in accordance with the child's interest; considered at each statutory review; and monitored and revised regularly so that difficulties are identified and arrangements adjusted accordingly.
- 6.6 **Appendix A** provides indicative guidance for the frequency of supervised contact based on Purpose and the age of the child.
- 6.7 Information obtained must be recorded appropriately, based on evidence, and include analysis of the:
- purpose (this is to have been identified prior to requesting the service see section 4);
 - type; and

- duration and frequency of supervised contact.

6.8 The child's Social Worker must be clear about why and how they have come to the decisions about the purpose, type and frequency of the contact so that they can, where required, justify this decision at a Contact Agreement Meeting and possibly in Court.

7 The Contact Agreement Form and Contact Agreement Meeting

7.1 Once the child's Social Worker has identified the child's contact needs, the Contact Agreement Form is to be completed in draft.

7.2 At the Contact Agreement Meeting the draft form will be completed in full in consultation with parents, the child's Social Worker, Foster Carers and the Contact Supervisor. This is to ensure that everyone is clear about the arrangements for the supervised contact, including its purpose, what is expected and what the arrangements are for recording and reporting.

7.3 There must be an avoidance of jargon.

7.4 The child's Social Worker is to ensure that where contact visits are to be observed and recorded as part of an assessment, or where they are used therapeutically to directly influence parenting or family functioning, the adults (and the children, where appropriate) will be informed and this activity will be reflected in the Contact Agreement.

7.5 The Contact Supervisor must ensure that a child's Contact Agreement is up to date and provided in writing to all involved unless there is a verifiable reason not to do so. The need for supervised contact must be kept under regular review by the Family Support Contact Team Manager

7.6 The child's Social Worker must ensure that the child's Contact Agreement is recorded in the:

1. Care Plan;
2. Court Care Plan;
3. Placement Information Record (irrespective of whether the application is for an Interim or Full Care Order); and
4. Is to be authorised by their Team Manager.

7.7 Within the care planning and review process, supervised contact arrangements must be explicit and differentiate between supervised contact which is working towards either reunification or maintain family links whilst working towards permanency elsewhere

8 Recording, Review and Re-assessment

8.1 The following information must be recorded as standard components of recording the supervised contact session:

- The environment where contact took place;
- Duration of contact
- The activity or play opportunity undertaken;
- Evidence and information about the child/parent/relative relationship, including parent(s)/relatives ability to keep to timing;
- Managing any practical logistics and difficulties which may need resolving.

8.2 Additional recording arrangements in certain cases may be required to add value to the Family Support Summary and Contact Review Meeting. This will be agreed at the Contact Agreement Meeting. i.e:

- Any physical contact or the nature of any conversations, in cases where the child has experienced sexual abuse; and
- Evidence of alcohol or substance misuse by the parent(s)/relatives attending the supervised contact sessions.

8.3 Within three working days after each supervised contact session the Contact Supervisor must record details of the session onto the Family Support Summary.

8.4 After the final scheduled supervised contact session the Contact Supervisor is to finalise the Family Support Summary. This summary is to include an analysis of all the supervised contact sessions and be reviewed by the Family Support Contact Team Manager in preparation for a Contact Review Meeting.

8.5 The Contact Review Meeting is to be attended by the parents, child's Social Worker, and Contact Supervisor. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the Family Support Summary and review the specific arrangements for contact. The outcomes of this meeting may be:

- No change to the arrangements;
- Re-assessment of child's needs including considerations for the need for supervised contact;
- Amendments to the arrangements and a new Contact Agreement Form completed to reflect these changes; or
- End of Supervised Contact sessions.

8.6 Following the Contact Review Meeting the Family Support Contact Team Team Manager is to authorise the Family Support Summary.

8.7 The child's Social Worker must summarise the contact arrangements within the Care Plan, ensuring that any changes are explicitly recorded. The Contact Agreements and arrangements must be discussed and monitored at each statutory Child Care Review. Particular attention will be given to the Contact Agreement whenever the Care Plan is significantly changed or there is a sudden change of circumstances.

9 Suspension, Refusal or Varying Supervised Contact

- 9.1 Even though there is a duty to promote contact, children have the right to be protected from harmful contact. Supervised contact must only be suspended when there is clear evidence that it prevents the safeguarding of the child's welfare.
- 9.2 The Local Authority can only refuse contact in circumstances whereby they are satisfied that it is necessary to safeguard the child. This can only be for seven days without an order of the court and the Local Authority has to make application and be heard by the court within seven days of such refusal.
- 9.3 If the Local Authority are to refuse supervised contact legal advice must be immediately sought from the Legal Team and recorded on the case record when refusal of supervised contact is being considered. Only a Team Manager (Family Support Service or Children in Care service) can authorise the refusal of Supervised Contact. Written approval from the Head of Service must be made before making an application to the Court to refuse supervised contact in the longer term.
- 9.4 The child's Social Worker is responsible for convening a meeting as soon as possible after the supervised contact has been refused. The meeting is to be attended by the social worker, their Team Manager, the parents and the Family Support Worker. The purpose of this meeting will be to find a resolution and ensure that where parents or family members need help, or access to resources, in order to maintain contact with the child, an assessment is carried out to identify how and what level of assistance can be provided.
- 9.5 Supervised Contact may also be suspended, refused or varied when there is agreement with the person in relation to whom the order is made, for example the parents, and provided that the child, being of sufficient age and understanding, also agrees.

Notification of those affected

- 9.6 Upon the supervised contact being suspended or where an application is made to the Court to refuse contact and a Court order is granted, the child's Social Worker must notify within five working days:
- the child, unless it would not be appropriate to do so having regard to Child's age and understanding;
 - the child's Parents (if not the person with whom the agreement has been made)
 - the child's guardian;
 - the person in whose favour a residence order was in force immediately before the care order was made;
 - any other person whose wishes and feelings are considered to be relevant; and
 - the Independent Reviewing Officer.
- 9.7 The notification must include:
- The decision,
 - The date of the decision,
 - The reasons for the decision,
 - The duration of the new arrangement,
 - The remedies available in the case of dissatisfaction.

APPENDIX A – INDICATIVE GUIDE FOR CONTACT ARRANGEMENTS

Age	Purpose of Contact		
	Maintaining contact pending determination	Safety and Reunification	Identity
0 - 2	2 hour session 3 times per week	2 hour sessions 5 times per week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where direct contact is agreed: 1 hour session once a year if child is adopted to a max. 2 hour session twice a year; If Indirect contact is agreed: One or two way, minimum of once a year.
	3 hour session 3 times per week	3 hour sessions 3 times per week Leading to some overnights when assessment indicates that this is appropriate and reunification is likely (placement with parents as applicable).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If direct contact is agreed: 1 hour session once a year if child is adopted to a max. 2 hour session twice a year; If Indirect contact is agreed: One or two way, minimum of once a year
5 – 9	1 hour (After school) session 2 times per week	1 hour (mid – week) session 3 times per week; and 2 hour session on the weekend Leading to some overnights when assessment indicates that this is appropriate and reunification is likely (placement with parents as applicable).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If direct contact is agreed: 2 hour session once a year if child is adopted to a max. 4 hour session twice a year If Indirect contact is agreed: One or two way, minimum of once a year. If long term fostering is agreed: 3 hour session once a month plus indirect as agreed.
10 - 16	2 hour (After School) session Once a week	1.5 hour weekday session 2 times per week; and 3 hour session on the weekend. Leading to some overnights when assessment indicates that this is appropriate and reunification is likely (placement with parents as applicable).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If direct contact is agreed: 2 hour session once a year if child is adopted; If indirect contact is agreed: One or two way, minimum once a year. If long term fostering is agreed: Up to 6 hour session once a month plus indirect as agreed.