

**Report to:** Corporate Parenting Panel

**Date of meeting:** 24 July 2024

**By:** Director of Children's Services

**Title:** Family Time (Community Family Work Service)

**Purpose:** To update the panel on the work of the Community Family Work (CFW) Service

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## ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note and discuss the report.

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### **1. Background**

1.1 The Looked After Children's CFW service offers countywide provision of supervised contact, life story book work (for infants) and reunification family support. The service is operated out of 3 sites across the county. Hailsham Family Resource Centre, Silverlands St Leonard's and Meeching Centre Newhaven.

### **2. Supporting information**

2.1 The Children Act 1989 requires the local authority to promote reasonable contact for Looked After Children. The frequency and duration will be proposed in the Care Plan submitted to the court prior to an Order being made.

2.2 Currently, 24,949 contact hours are provided for children and their families each year and the service works with an average of 309 looked-after children. During supervised contact, the role of the CFW is to create a positive and welcoming atmosphere, observe the contact, keep the children safe and record the content of each session. The CFWs plan this special time for the children and their families by organising a range of activities such as games, arts, crafts, reading and homework.

2.3 Direct contact ceased in March until July 2020 as a result of the Covid pandemic. Due to the national restrictions, the service maintained family contact by offering a virtual platform for children to meet their parents. This was very successful, and some families preferred this method of contact, therefore the service has continued to offer virtual contact to complement face to face meetings.

2.4 East Sussex County Council has a proactive reunification programme whereby plans are made at the earliest opportunity for children to return to the care of their parents. The CFW service supports an incremental reduction in supervised contact with fewer interventions and a move for supervised contact to take place less often in contact centres and more often in the community. The family's time together will be gradually transferred to the home environment which will include overnight stays during the transition period. The CFWs continue to offer support within the family's home once the children have returned in order to build confidence between the parents and children.

2.5 The CFW service also prepares life story books for infants and toddlers who have a plan for adoption. A life story book provides an age-appropriate narrative for the child to keep as a record of their journey through care. This will include details from the child's case record and contain photos and keepsakes provided by parents, foster carers and other important people in their life.

2.6 The purpose of these books is to nurture an understanding of what has happened to them, enrich their knowledge of their time looked-after and explain the decisions which have been made about their future.

2.7 A presentation on Looked After Children's Community Family Worker (contact) Service is attached as Appendix 1.

### **3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

3.1 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note and discuss the report.

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#### LOCAL MEMBERS

All

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None