THE ACORN FEDERATION
LONG LANE CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOL
MARSTON MONTGOMERY SCHOOL

Home Visits Guidance

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Children's Services Department

Home Visits Guidance

Review Date	Changes Required	Name & Position

"All policies and other documentation provided to the client by Derbyshire County Council remain exclusively the property of the Council. The client is entitled to retain and use these items only for so long as its contract with the Council subsists. Upon the contract's termination, all such items shall cease to be used by the client, with immediate effect, and shall be promptly returned to the Council. In the event of breach by the client of this agreement, the Council reserves all legal rights and remedies".

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Children's Services Home Visit Guidance

Introduction

Direct work with service users in their homes is a vital part of the role carried out by Children's Services staff and the general perception is that this work constitutes a high risk to staff. The reality however is that despite this being an increasing area of work and the significant number of home visits carried out, over the last 5 years there have only been 5 incidents of assault reported arising from work on home visits and these were either verbal or resulted in minor injuries.

Notwithstanding the above department recognises the potential risk involved in this type of work. This document therefore outlines the procedures to be followed for all home visits carried out by Children's Services staff and volunteers irrespective of their role or service. Its intention is to ensure staff can still carry out the work required as part of their role as flexibly as necessary. It has been designed to ensure appropriate measures are in place across all teams within the Department who carry out this work to protect the health and safety of all staff.

This guidance gives the minimum standards that the Local Authority expect to be in place and should be adopted and adapted as necessary by those teams who's staff carry out home visits and who don't currently have their own procedures in place. Those teams who have their own procedures are encouraged to keep using those procedures but to ensure they meet the minimum standards set out in this guidance.

The guidance covers any situation where staff or volunteers work in someone's home irrespective of how the work is referred to the team, including but not limited to

- Assessment Visits By Workers e.g. *assessment following referral to MAT, Social care etc*
- Direct Work with Children or Family Members *e.g. parenting assessment, boundary setting etc*
- Provision of on-going support *e.g. statutory visit, unannounced monitoring etc*

The guidance also covers all situations where this work takes place including both first time referrals and on-going work with clients over a long timescale and includes all visits whether they be planned or unplanned and whether they be pre-arranged with the client or unannounced.

All staff should also read and be familiar with the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children's Board 'Multi Agency Guidance on Home Visits' and the Children's Services Lone Working Guidance and Risk Assessment. These are all available via DNet.

In order for this guidance to be effective it is vital that staff utilise Mosaic I and ensure that the information on the system is kept up to date. Any teams whose staff do not have access to Mosaic I that carry out Home Visits should discuss this with the Children's Services Head of Information to gain appropriate access.

In order that communication with staff in the event of an emergency can be easily facilitated it is sensible for each team to keep a folder in a secure location within their team base with contact details for each member of staff and their next of kin/emergency contact details which all team members know how to access if the need arises. Teams should establish a suitable system for ensuring these details are

available where staff carry out high risk visits out of hours whilst bearing in mind data protection requirements.

All staff will use their Outlook Calendar to record in advance all home visits (separate arrangements will need to be in place for volunteers). It is important that calendars are set up so that team members can see the information in them (not just "busy") and that you have nominated key staff to be able to input information into your calendar (this is important so that if you decide to carry out an unplanned visit whilst out of the office there is a local system in place to phone in to so that your location can be recorded and managers/team members can access it in an emergency).

Prior to Any Visit

Staff must be clear why they are making a home visit, and the outcomes they plan to achieve.

It is essential that when staff visit a client's home they have as much information as possible about the home, the people and any risks that the visit may present. This applies whether this is a planned or unplanned visit and whether it is a first visit or part of on-going provision.

- Before the visit staff should collect as much information on the home and family's history and any risks to their safety this may present as possible. Mosaic should always be the first port of call for staff to obtain any information especially checking for any known flagged risks. Staff should also be aware that lack of a flagged risk does not automatically mean that a home is safe. You should also if possible consult with any other agencies that know or work with the family to see if they are aware of any known risks.
- Where there is a specific risk assessment already in place for a family who present a significant risk to workers this should be consulted (if it is from another agency/team then you should ensure the control measures are adapted to the circumstances of your team)
- Where no risk assessment exists for new clients an assessment based on the information available should be carried out. If it is deemed that the new client does not present a significant risk this should be recorded. Where a significant risk is identified then a specific risk assessment should be carried out flagged and recorded on Mosaic indicating the known risks and suitable risk control measures to be adopted. .

Risk assessments should be carried out in line with the Children's Services risk assessment guidelines and should take into account guidance in the threshold document and the violence and lone working guidance and risk assessments (links to be inserted). Whilst risk assessments are likely to be carried out by the staff involved in carrying out the visit it is ultimately the responsibility of the team manager acting on behalf of the Local Authority to ensure they are appropriate and fit for purpose. It is the responsibility of the team manager therefore to sign off all risk assessments as appropriate. The views of the worker undertaking the risk assessment should be taken into account as part of this process.

The following are example control measures that could be included in a risk assessment (they are by no means exhaustive and are included to help staff get started other control measures are also listed throughout the document).

- Mosaic consulted for client case history prior to appointments

- Other agencies consulted to establish any client case history
- Staff aware of and apply tracking system
- Details of visit recorded in line with tracking system
- Agreed phone in procedure agreed
- Agreed time limit in place after which if staff have not phoned or returned to base in contact is made with member of staff
- Staff have received lone worker training
- Park your car facing the direction you intend to go when you are leaving particularly if it is a no through road
- Where possible park your car with the driver's door facing the direction from which you will return to your car. This will enable you to avoid having to go around the car to get in.
- Where possible try and park in a well-lit area.
- Always wear your DCC ID badge.
- ID badges will be on clips or lanyards which split/break if grabbed
- Sit near the door and do not allow clients to sit between you and the exit, so that if required you can make a quick exit.
- Avoid taking equipment and too many files into the house in case you have to make a quick exit.
- If when you arrive at the home you feel unsure about what you are going into, or there are unforeseen circumstances, trust your instincts and do not enter the property.
- Ask for dogs to be locked in a separate room if necessary during the visit
- Always have your mobile phone with you and ensure it is charged.
- Check you have a mobile phone signal prior to undertaking the visit

If, having completed your risk assessment, you still have concerns regarding safety either due to the information recorded or where information is sketchy or absent this should be discussed directly with your manager to ensure that appropriate measures are agreed to reduce the risks to an acceptable level which are also recorded as part of the risk assessment process. These may include such things as:

- Where possible arranging the visit(s) at a venue other than the clients home where there are appropriate systems in place to protect staff.
- Arranging to have an appropriate 2nd person accompany you during the visit
- Utilising lone worker tracking and monitoring devices or having a detailed agreed contact procedure and timescale with agreed actions if no response.

It is important that any information is obtained as close to the visit taking place as possible so that it is current. Staff carrying out unplanned checks on a home or client will need to obtain as much up to date information as possible before visiting. It is also vital that staff carrying out home visits with clients with whom they have been working for a long period but have not had recent contact with still carry out a check to ensure nothing has changed since their last contact before a visit is undertaken.

There are also a number of other practical issues staff should ensure before any home visit.

- Ensure you have any necessary equipment (e.g. mobile phone, lone worker Device, torch etc.) and that it is fully charged.
- Plan your route, make sure you are familiar with the area and know where you can park safely.
- Make sure all your contact numbers are up to date in the team folder

- Ensure you are familiar with and comply with the team's tracking/tracing system
- Don't leave anything in your car which identifies you as a DCC employee
- Ensure you do not leave any material visible in your car which identifies you and gives home address e.g. letters, utility bills etc.

Home Visits During Office Hours

Each team should develop its own local tracking system relevant to the resources available to it and the type of work being carried out. This tracking system needs to be such that the manager can be assured that staff who are carrying out home visits which are deemed to be high risk (i.e. those for which there is a specific risk assessment) or those about which staff have a particular concern for any reason either; return to the office or phone in to say they have left the visit safely, if going on to another visit or going home at the end of the day if this is the last visit. This should be within an agreed timeframe after the visit is due to conclude. It also needs to be developed in such a way that staff attending these identified higher risk visits are monitored closely where necessary.

The tracking system as a minimum should be based on the following principals:

- Staff should always use their outlook calendar to record the visit including :
  - Who they are visiting
  - Address including postcode where these details are not recorded on Mosaic (time to include start and finish)
  - If returning to office following last visit expected return time
  - If planning to go straight home this should be recorded as part of details of last appointment
  - Contact number

Staff who are out of the office or who will not be back in the office before a visit is made should phone in the details so their outlook calendar can be updated.

- A designated person should be responsible for monitoring the tracking system on a daily basis (this does not have to be the same person each day) and all staff should know who this is.

- A designated Manager should be available to deal with emergency situations.

- Teams should consider having a phone which is only contacted in an emergency situation all staff can then have this number programmed on speed dial

- Staff who are out of the office for most of the day should phone into the office at intervals so the designated person knows that they safe between home visits.

- If the visit is longer than expected and you are therefore going to overrun your expected completion time you must, contact the office at your earliest opportunity and give them a new expected finish time.

- For identified high risk situations (where a specific risk assessment has been carried out or staff have identified specific concerns relating to a visit for whatever reason) if staff have not called in at the expected completion time, or if expected to return to the office have not arrived within a

specified time period, the designated member of staff will attempt to contact them on the given contact number. If this is not possible they will allow 5 minutes and then try again if contact is still not possible allow another 5 minutes and try again. If after 2 attempts contact is still not established the designated member of staff will contact the named Manager / Contact and supply them with the missing staff member's contact and visit details.

- The Manager will then attempt to contact the worker, if the worker is not contactable the Manager will risk assess the situation and put in place an appropriate response (this could be anything from phoning home or next of kin to see if worker has returned to phoning Police).

- If at any time you feel unsafe during the visit you should make an excuse and leave.

- If you feel under immediate threat and are unable to leave for any reason you should dial 999.

Home visits out of office hours for high risk visits or those where a concern has been raised.

All of the above principals apply and in addition:

A system needs to be in place that ensures that those staff undertaking high risk visits out of hours are able to confirm that they have left the visit as expected and safely. If teams already have a system that works for them they should ensure it is documented and managers should monitor that it is effective. If no such system exists the following will need to be put in place:

- A designated manager should be responsible for receiving calls from and tracking staff who are working out of hours and for dealing with emergency situations.
- The designated manager will have access to all the details of the out of hours visits and be able to access emergency contact details (see details above)
- The designated manager will ensure they are available and contactable until all their staff working out of hours have phoned in.
- All staff will be aware of who the designated manager is and will phone in at the end of their appointment to confirm that they have left the property and are on the way home safely.

Cancelled Visits

Staff will inform the designated contact that a visit has been cancelled and ensure their diary is adjusted accordingly.

Unscheduled Visits

Unscheduled or unplanned visits are often required for a variety of reasons where staff have the ability to call in to do a visit between existing planned visits. These visits will often be carried out without calling back into the office first. It is vital that these visits are only carried out in line with the safe practice outlined above in regards to things to do prior to the visit and that staff have phoned in to ensure that the relevant people know where they are and how to trace them in the event that it is necessary.

Staff carrying out unplanned checks on existing clients with whom they have not had recent contact will need to contact their base to ask the designated person to check Mosaic to ensure that there have

been no changes to the risk information held there since their last contact with the client and feed back to them before they undertake the visit.

Unscheduled or unplanned visits should never be carried out to new clients or as first time visits as it is unlikely that you will be able to obtain all the necessary safety information prior to the visit.

If you cannot obtain up to date safety information prior to the visit, the visit should not take place as a lone worker and alternative safety control measures must be put in place.

If you are unable to let the designated person know where you within your localised tracking arrangements - the visit shouldn't take place.

During The Visit

When carrying out a home visit ensure you always position yourself with a direct exit route from the premises, do not allow clients to place themselves between you and the exit and that you are aware of any other control measures in the risk assessment.

Staff undertaking home visits should be aware of how their actions may be interpreted by the clients and at all times remain within the professional boundaries expected of staff working for the department.

If checking bedrooms or other upstairs rooms do not allow yourself to be trapped, ask the client to go upstairs before you, if there is more than one person in the house encourage them both to go up with you. If this is not possible leave the upstairs check until the next visit and take an appropriate colleague with you. Try and keep an exit between you and the family.

Do not be afraid to terminate and reschedule the visit should you be uncomfortable with the particular situation you find yourself in. This should be recorded on Mosaic.

Note
The Acorn Federation does not have access to Mosaic. Records of Home Visits will be stored in pupil buff folders.

Staff will always carry out home visits in pairs.