



Cheshire East

# **TOGETHER** for Children and Young People

*Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young*

## Family Time Policy

### Children and Families

December 2023



<b>Policy Information Sheet</b>	
<b>Service Area</b>	Children and Families
<b>Date effective from</b>	December 2023
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Family Time Manager
<b>Date for Review</b>	December 2025
<b>Status</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mandatory (all staff name must adhere to guidance)</b></li> <li>• <b>Optional (Procedures and practice can vary between teams)</b></li> </ul>	Mandatory
<b>Target Audience</b>	All staff within Children and Families
<b>Related Document(s)</b>	Family Time One Minute Guide
<b>Superseded Documents</b>	Family Time Policy 2020
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	Checklist completed – see over
<b>Date of Approval</b>	29 November 2023

<b>Type of Document</b>	Policy	X	Standard Operating Procedure		Guideline	
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## Document control

Version no	Type of change	Date	Description of change

If you have any comments or views on this document, please contact us at [childrensdevelopmentandpartnerships@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:childrensdevelopmentandpartnerships@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

## Equality Impact Assessment

Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) must be completed whenever you plan, change, or remove a service, policy or function. They should be an **integral** part of continuous service planning and policy development. For further details and guidance on completing EIAs please see [here](#).

### EIA Checklist

Equality Impact Assessment			
<b>1</b>	<b>Does the policy/guidance affect one group less or more favourably than another on the basis of:</b>	Yes/ No	<b>Comments</b>
	Race	N	
	Ethnic origins (including gypsies and travellers)	N	
	Nationality	N	
	Gender	N	
	Culture	N	
	Religion or belief	N	
	Sexual orientation including lesbian, gay and bisexual people	N	
	Age	N	
	Disability-learning disabilities, physical disability, sensory impairment and mental health problems	N	
<b>2</b>	<b>Is there any evidence that some groups are affected differently?</b>	N	
	If you have identified potential discrimination, are any exceptions valid, legal and/or justifiable?	N/A	
<b>3</b>	<b>Is the impact of the policy/guidance likely to be negative?</b>	N	
a	If yes can the impact be avoided?	N/A	
b	What alternatives are there to achieving the policy / guidance without the impact?	N/A	
c	Can we reduce the impact by taking different action	N/A	
<b>4</b>	<b>Evidence considered – What data or other information have you used to evaluate if this policy is likely to have a positive or an adverse impact upon protected groups when implemented?</b>	Yes	The previous policy has been viewed and relevant changes have been made following consultation with staff, parents/carers and children.
<b>5</b>	<b>Initial consultation – Have you consulted staff representatives and/or external representatives including those from protected groups? What were their views?</b>	Yes	See above/below
<b>6</b>	<b>Promoting equality - Does this policy have a positive impact on equality? What evidence is there to support this? Could it do more?</b>	Yes	From consulting with colleagues and service users, feedback has been constructive and positive, and this has shaped the development of this document.

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## **Restorative and Relational Practice**

In Cheshire East, we use Restorative Practice, as our way of working with families. This model of practice is based on therapeutic thinking that encourages working with children, young people and families to build on their strengths, empowering them to better manage the risks and challenges they may face now and in the future. The restorative approach underpins this policy and how we work in Cheshire East.

## **Executive Summary**

This policy sets out how Cheshire East Children's Services will promote and facilitate Family Time (contact) between children and their families who are in court proceedings or who are Cared for by the Local Authority.

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Cheshire East Council is fully committed to promoting Family Time for cared for children and young people.
- 1.2 We not only have a legal duty to promote Family Time for children in care, but evidence shows that getting this right can improve long term outcomes for children and young people.
- 1.3 Cheshire East Council always gives full consideration to the arrangements for Family Time within the overall care planning process for the child and will take account of the voice of the child and their wishes and feelings.
- 1.4 Cheshire East Council has a dedicated Family Time Service.

### **2. Aims and Principles**

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to provide a clear structure for determining appropriate arrangements for Family Time with children and young people who are subject to care proceedings or who are Cared for by the Local Authority.
- 2.2 Family Time places a greater emphasis on the quality and duration of the time as opposed to the frequency. In doing so, we acknowledge that each case is unique, and this may influence decisions in the application of this policy.
- 2.3 To do this effectively the following principles must apply:
  - Family Time must always be in the best interests of the child and focused on their needs, not focused on the needs of the parent or carer.
  - Any arrangements must be based on the needs identified in the child's care plan.
  - All Family Time Plans will be rooted in a full assessment of need, reflecting the welfare principles of the Children Act 1989 and will be able to demonstrate that all relevant parties within the plan have been consulted.

- Arrangements for Family Time will need to change over time to reflect the child's needs, wishes, feelings and relationships.

### **3. Purpose of Family Time**

- 3.1 Family Time primarily exists to enable children to maintain continuance of necessary relationships with their birth / family members, which should also include 'significant others' as it is not always family who are most important.
- 3.2 Family Time can also be a significant aid to the stability of the care placement itself.
- 3.3 Additionally, it can also provide:
- Reduced discomfort of divided loyalty and guilt
  - Reassurance about the parents' wellbeing
  - Maintenance of a realistic view of the non-resident or biological parent
  - Links with biological roots and identity
  - Reality of shared parental responsibility
  - Shared understandings of the past
  - Likelihood of later reunion in adulthood
  - Maintaining shared memories
- 3.4 Within the assessment phase, Family Time provides the opportunity to test out, support and model parenting styles and capacities. These activities occur alongside determining the child's needs and understanding their wishes and feelings.
- 3.5 Family Time may benefit both the child and birth relatives in numerous ways, but it is important to recognise that these benefits will not be present for all. In setting out the Family Time Plan for a child or young person it is important to set out and clarify the purpose(s) of the contact.
- 3.6 For the child, Family Time may assist in:
- helping to ease their sense of loss and provide reassurance about the wellbeing of birth relatives and significant others.
  - maintaining relationships that are important to them.
  - assessing whether reunification with the birth family is possible.
  - maintaining relationships so that reunification is possible.
  - Understanding / building their identity.
  - understanding their life journey.
  - supporting cultural, religious and identity needs, especially for children from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) groups who are not placed in culturally matched placements.

- 3.7 For children in long-term placements, including adoption, Family Time may also assist in:
- helping them to understand the past.
  - providing an opportunity for the young person to gain more knowledge and understanding about their personal and family history.
  - helping them to maintain links with their race, religion, and culture of origin – which may enhance their self-esteem and identity.
  - linking their past and present.
  - enabling them to see their birth family's acceptance of their carers and therefore reducing feelings of potential conflict.
- 3.8 For the birth family, Family Time may assist in:
- helping to ease their sense of loss.
  - maintaining relationships so that reunification remains a possibility.
  - assessing and developing parenting skills.
  - promoting sibling contact.
- 3.9 In long-term placements, Family Time may also help birth families through:
- Enabling them to come to terms with the new circumstances including acceptance of the carers
  - Enabling them to give the child a link with the past and reassurance
- 3.10 For the carer, Family Time may assist in:
- providing reassurance for the child, reducing anxiety, fear of rejection and improving placement stability.
  - improving the carers' understanding of the child's birth family and providing information from the past which may assist in understanding current and future behaviour of the child.
  - understanding the child's life journey.
- 3.11 In long-term placements, Family Time may also assist carers in:
- working with the child's story throughout the course of childhood rather than closing off the child's past.
  - encouraging discussion with the child and helping them to understand their situation better.
  - allowing birth families to give carers permission to parent the child.
  - helping the carer to give the child a view of relationships which can change over time as circumstances change.

## 4. Frequency

- 4.1 The frequency of Family Time will necessarily alter dependent upon the purpose of it and the age of the child. This will vary also from case to case. It must be acknowledged that some children are involved in multiple Family Time arrangements which, if not carefully managed, allow them little time to form attachments with their carers, develop routines and stability.

- 4.2 Young children who are removed from harm and provided with secure caregiving are able to form an attachment to their new carer. However, this attachment can be compromised if family contact with the child's birth family is not sensitively handled (Schofield and Simmonds, 2011).
- 4.3 Infants who have frequent Family Time with their birth family may suffer constant disruption to their daily routines and may be unable to experience the kinds of settled caregiving they need to help repair the harm they have experienced. Such Family Time arrangements can produce high levels of stress for the infant through discontinuity of care and potentially insensitive care during Family Time. It can then be a challenge for carers to help the infant to relax and trust them and may compromise the child's development.
- 4.4 The quality of Family Time between the child and their parent is the overriding feature to ensure maximum benefit for the child. Frequency, method, and duration will be informed by:
- Purpose of Family Time, i.e., assessments
  - Emotional capability of the child and parent to cope with the Family Time
  - Views of the child
  - Potential disruption and stress to the child caused by the Family Time arrangements
  - Ages of children
  - Previous parental engagement with Family Time service
- 4.5 The table below outlines the view on frequency of Family Time depending on age of the child. We aim to be flexible to accommodate all requests for Family Time. However, this will be dependent on demand, and the ages of children will be considered. For example, children under school age will be allocated times between 9am -2.30pm, which will allow school age children to attend from 3pm onwards.

Age	Maintaining Family Time during the assessment period	Safety and reunification	Identity – adoption, SGO, Long-term fostering
0-2 years	1.5 – 2-hour sessions 3x per week	2-hour sessions 3x per week; overnight to be considered dependent on the care planning and outcome of court proceedings and whether reunification is likely.	Dependent on the outcome of the Final Care Plan
3-4 years	2-hour sessions 2x per week	2-hour sessions 2x per week; overnight to be considered dependent on the care planning and outcome of court proceedings.	Dependent on the outcome of the Final Care Plan
5-10 years	1-hour (after school) 2x per week	1-hour session, 2x per week and then 1x 2-hour session at the weekend; overnight depending	Dependent on the outcome of the Final Care Plan



		on the care planning and whether reunification is likely.	
11-16 years	2-hour (after school) session once per week	1.5-hour weekday session 2x per week; overnight depending on the care planning and whether reunification is likely.	Dependent on the outcome of the Final Care Plan

- 4.6 Family Time sessions provided during the assessment and court-related stages will be offered on weekdays only at no more than two hours in length. In exceptional circumstances, if the needs of the child dictate it, sessions can be arranged at weekends.
- 4.7 Family Time that coincides with a Bank Holiday will only be rescheduled in exceptional circumstances.
- 4.8 Family Time frequency and length of contact over Christmas; to allow all cared for children an equal opportunity to see their parents and/or family during the festive period, contact sessions will be offered on a pro-rotta basis dependent on how many contacts are normally scheduled per week. Additional Family Time may be achieved should parties within proceedings, carers and the family network be agreeable to supervise a safe contact arrangement between themselves. Normal Family Time arrangements will resume from the first working day in January.

## 5. Family Time within the Assessment Phase

- 5.1 The frequency of Family Time must be based on assessed needs of the child:
- Children aged under four years: Assessed Family Time will be provided at a maximum of two hours per session. There is a statutory entitlement that cared for children will access the two-year-old offer for pre-school provision, followed on by entitlements for provision for three- and four-year-olds. This entitlement is designed to ensure that cared for children make the best possible start to their education and development. Family Time frequency needs to take full account of this national policy and ensure that there is a balance between the needs for contact and for educational development alongside time for unstructured play, rest, and socialisation.
  - Whilst it is recognised that new-born babies are offered high frequency contact with birth parents. Consideration is needed to allow time for the baby to settle in placement, form an attachment with their primary carer, plus considering lengthy period away from placement being transported to contact is not always in the interest of very young children.
  - Children of statutory school age: Assessed Family Contact should take into account the assessed needs of the child and ensure the need to balance the

need for the assessment to take place without detracting from the child's educational needs and the need to develop and maintain peer relationships.

- 5.2 **NOTE:** Disruption to a child's educational placement and development should be kept to an absolute minimum; sessions should not usually take place during school/pre-school time. Travel time, homework or after-school activity needs, together with the child's needs to make or maintain peer relationships should be considered when ascertaining contact frequency.

## **6. Family Time in the Post-Assessment Phase**

- 6.1 In this phase, whilst court proceedings are not completed, the assessment phase has concluded. There may still be a need to test and model changes to parenting styles as well as to observe any consequent changes. Additionally, there are often safeguarding issues to take account of and ensure that the child feels safe and supported during these sessions.
- 6.2 As the formal assessment will be concluded, there will be a need to review the frequency of Family Time in the light of the findings of the assessment and family networks. Any changes must be endorsed by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), see Appendix 2, Point 11 regarding their role.
- 6.3 Mid-point reviews will need to be scheduled by the social worker once assessments have concluded. There will be a presumption that frequency will begin to decrease if the assessment indicates that rehabilitation is an unlikely outcome. If this is the case, Family Time will normally be provided at a maximum frequency of two sessions of two hours duration per week for all age groups. This may need to be split between separated parents.

## **7. Family Time where rehabilitation is agreed**

- 7.1 This will need to be at a pace to meet the needs of the child and family to test and support reunification. The frequency of such rehabilitation sessions will be determined by the needs of the child irrespective of their age.

## **8. On-going Family Time**

- 8.1 Should the child be made the subject of a final order and placed outside of their family, account must be taken of the needs of the child and the purpose of Family Time when determining contact frequency. Family networks must be explored with the expectation that they conduct Family Time.
- 8.2 The frequency of Family Time in these circumstances will depend on an ongoing assessment of the child's needs, wishes and feelings. The length of each session should be determined by the needs of the child. Where parents are

separated, or other extended family members are felt to be important to the child's needs, the sessions should be split or balanced between them.

## **9. Sibling Contact**

- 9.1 Sibling contacts should always be considered and, if appropriate, arranged as a separate event from parent(s) sessions. It should be additional to the above frequencies' dependent upon the needs of all the siblings.

## **10. Non-Attendance of Parents at Family Time**

- 10.1 If parents or family members regularly miss scheduled Family Time without notice or without satisfactory explanation, then, in discussion with a Team/Service Manager, Family Time will be placed on hold pending a meeting with the parents or family members, which will be arranged within five working days of the date of notice. The decision should be notified to all interested parties, including parent(s), child(ren) if they are of an age to understand, and any guardians of the child.
- 10.2 If non-attendance by parents or family members continues, then Family Time should be reduced until the parent or family member has attended a level of contact regularly.
- 10.3 Once regular attendance has been achieved, consideration should be given as to whether it is in the best interests of the child to increase the level of Family Time to the level originally specified.
- 10.4 Where there are active care proceedings the Local Authority Solicitor with conduct for the case should be informed of the intention to suspend contact and the date of any meeting.

## **11. Roles and Responsibilities with Family Time Arrangements**

- 11.1 It is the responsibility of the social worker to complete a Family Time 'Contact Team Referral Form' on Liquid Logic – [Contact Team Referral Process Map.pdf](#). This is located within the child/children's electronic records. The form is mandatory and must be completed in full and consolidated providing a record/form on each child requiring Family Time.
- 11.2 The social worker's Team Manager will approve the Family Time Contact Service Referral and progress it to the Family Time Allocation Work Tray.
- 11.3 It is the responsibility of the Team Manager to invite the Family Time Manager to case handover and transfer meetings. The expectation is that the child's contact should be seamless, and no contacts should cease until the receiving workers are identified.

- 11.4 The Family Time Manager is responsible for the allocation of work. Any queries regarding the Family Time Service Referral will be addressed with the social worker and team manager prior to allocation to the family time service / worker who will take responsibility for case management for the child or young person's contact. This will include planning of regular contact review meetings.
- 11.5 The Cheshire East Family Time Service will provide family time workers / supervisors and assist in the identified support; modelling and observation tasks up until court proceedings are completed. It is the responsibility of the social worker to ensure any assessment tasks required to be undertaken by the family time worker are agreed and clearly communicated.
- 11.6 When Family Time is being supervised during court proceedings, there is an expectation that the allocated social worker will attend and observe Family Time on at least two occasions as part of their assessment and to assist with the formulation of plans.
- 11.7 The social worker is also responsible for determining the Family Time Plan and completion of a risk assessment (RA1) if required. All these matters should be discussed, agreed, and recorded in the initial Family Time Contact Planning Meeting, to be attended by the social worker, family time manager, family time workers, fostering, parents and carers. The child/ren's allocated social worker is responsible for initiating and scheduling the Contact Planning Meeting. Appendix 4 contains the agenda / template.
- 11.8 The risk assessment (RA1) must be carried out when it is deemed that there are risks related to any safety factors for the child and family time workers / supervisors. This might be related to potential aggression / parental mental health / substance misuse, or allegations / data breaches that might impact onto the wellbeing of the child. The risk assessment can also be used as a tool for assessing if the child's behaviour and needs, including medical needs, pose any risks and what could be put in place for any risks to be managed.
- 11.9 The Cheshire East Family Time Service will provide a Family Time offer, including set times and dates on allocation. The social worker is responsible to ensure it is communicated with all parties and if not satisfactory, then ownership is with the social worker to manage the expectation of contact if our service offer is declined.
- 11.10 A Family Time Agreement (Appendix 3) needs to be put in place with parents (or any other relevant party) prior to Family Time going ahead. This should be an agreement which is formed with parents about the plans and expectations that includes the expectations of parents and that of Children's Social Care.
- 11.11 A provisional Family Time Agreement will be completed by the family time worker, and this will need to be agreed and endorsed by the social worker.
- 11.12 A Family Time Contact Plan with the frequency and details of contact will be completed. In the absence of a family time worker; the Family Time Manager is

responsible to source cover within the first instance and if unsuccessful the contact will be cancelled and the child/ren's allocated social worker / team manager will be informed.

11.13 The child/ren's allocated social worker is responsible for Family Time to be frequent and regular.

11.14 The child/ren's allocated social worker is responsible for inviting the family time worker to the child/ren's care planning, cared for review, plus pre-filing meetings.

11.15 During a supervised Family Time session, the Family Time worker / supervisor will:

- promote positive interactions by supporting the child and their parent(s).
- where appropriate and identified by the social worker, enable the development of parenting skills.
- be able to hear and see interaction between the child and the other participants in the session at all times.
- be mindful of any whispering, use of language that is not familiar to the worker and ensure any child using toilets that require assistance are supervised if this is required / identified.
- intervene where the child and family time worker have significant concerns about immediate safety and the emotional wellbeing of the child.
- report any safeguarding concerns immediately to the social worker, team manager and Family Time Manager.
- record Family Time on the child's electronic record using the Signs of Safety format/record of contact. This will be recorded within case notes under the relevant case note heading. Recordings should be completed as soon as possible and within two working days.
- Family Time case recordings may be used for evidence in care proceeding and assessment periods.



# Appendix 1

## Types of Family Time

### 1. Assessed Family Time

- This stage takes place once the child becomes Cared For under emergency or interim care orders. Arrangements must be made to assess the parenting capacities, their strengths, and weaknesses together with the needs of the child(ren) and their wishes and feelings.

### 2. Ongoing Contact

- This term describes the arrangements made for a child who no longer lives with his or her birth family for contact with them. The court proceedings will have been concluded and the Family Time Plan will be focused on the needs of the child. Sessions may need to be supervised or facilitated by the family network.

### 3. Indirect or Virtual Family Time

- A term used to describe parents and family members receiving information from or about their children. This would typically be by letter, postcard, the “letterbox” scheme, video/DVD footage, photographs, copies of school reports, etc. It may also be used when children and their families spend time together using virtual methods such as Zoom or FaceTime etc.

## Appendix 2

### Other Considerations

#### 1. Venues for Family Time;

- Cheshire East will provide suitable venues for the purpose of Family Time where assessed as necessary. Where Family Time is facilitated in a venue designated by Cheshire East, we will ensure that it is suitable for purpose and is compliant with Health and Safety requirements.
- Where agreed by the Social Worker, outings and trips out can form a part of the assessment where appropriate and safe to do so. In certain circumstances a community-based assessed family contact can be agreed by Social Workers – this may include the family's own home.
- Arrangements for ongoing and longer-term Family Time should be considered on an individual basis and should include an imaginative and varied selection of methods and venues to include community-based activities, home visits where appropriate, the use of virtual technology and formal venues where necessary.
- Consideration for long term contacts also need to ensure and include the family network.

#### 2. Transport Arrangements

- **The birth relative is expected to make their own way to the venue. Funding will be offered at the discretion of the social worker and Team Manager where it is evident that the family is experiencing hardship.**
- Children and young people should be transported to and from the sessions by their carer/residential worker to ensure the best interests of children are taken into account and remain with the child until the parent(s) arrive, thus ensuring that the child is not left alone with a supervisor.
- **Taxis should not normally be utilised for unaccompanied children of primary school age. Approved car seats must be used. The use of taxi transport, with or without an escort, must be agreed by a Service Manager within Children's Social Care. This agreement can be recorded within the Care Plan and Family Time planning meeting. \***
- Where carers cannot provide the necessary transport for the child, Fostering and the Family Time team will consider supporting transport. Account should be taken of service efficiency as well as actual costs.

#### 3. Food and Resources



- For community-based and centre-based assessments it shall be the parents' responsibility to provide meals, drinks and appropriate snacks. This expectation should be made known to the parents.
- Carers should supply formula milk and nappy change equipment where necessary and pass these to the supervisor.
- Activities and outings can be supported if these contribute to the assessment phase or meet the needs of the child for contact.

#### 4. Audit Trail and Costs Incurred

- **Children's Social Care establishments can be requested to consider contribution to parents/carers travel expenses and provide funds for activities were appropriate if agreed. The Care Plan should agree and detail the costs agreed in relation to assessment or contacts taking place and set these parameters.**

#### 5. Family Time Supervisors

- Supervisors of Family Time need to be fully briefed by their Family Time Manager and the Social Worker. The allocated Family Time Worker should familiarise themselves with the child from the child's electronic record, and if necessary, discuss the history and circumstances relating to Family Time with the social worker. The Family Time Worker will have a copy of the Family Time Plan & Agreement as well as sight of the Risk Assessment (RA1) before the arrangement commences.
- The Family Time Contact Planning Meeting should consider any potential risks the child or those they are having contact with may pose to one another, staff or other centre users. Any risk assessment (RA1) must be made known to the supervisor(s) of Family Time and venue used.
- Any additional tasks/work/assessment contributions i.e. sibling assessments need to be discussed between the Family Worker and Social Worker with clear expectations and guidance.
- The Family Time Service should aim to provide a consistent supervisor or group of supervisors for the child. Some sessions may additionally be observed by expert witnesses and CAFCASS officers. There is an expectation that the Social Worker observes some sessions.
- A template for reporting on supervised Family Time is available and provided on children's records in case notes.
- For sessions occurring outside of office hours the supervisors must have the telephone numbers of a manager and be able to ring them in emergency situations. All staff members should additionally have the telephone number of the Out of Hours service as a further safety consideration.

#### 6. Giving evidence in court

Where the child is currently subject to proceedings or may become subject to proceedings, the following should be taken into account.

- If a statement is required from a Family Time Worker, this needs to be a factual report and overseen by the Social Worker

- Where the child is subject to proceedings, Family Time records will be available to the court and shared with all involved parties.
- The family time worker may be asked to give evidence in court on and about the recordings made.

## 7. Preparation

- Children and birth relatives will need to be prepared for Family Time by the Social Worker. Birth parents need to be included in the contact planning meetings. Birth parents may need considerable guidance about expectations regarding their behaviour, especially when the Family Time forms part of an assessment regarding the possibilities of reunification.
- A Family Time Contact Planning Meeting must be held before arrangements commence.
- The process for if a child wishes to stop contact needs to be clear within their updated care plan; the social worker will agree clear expectations, evidencing the child's voice, along with their wishes why they want to end contact with appropriate support identified.

## 8. Family Time in Adoption

- There is no general presumption for or against Family Time in adoptive families. The child's need for contact with the birth family and other relatives/significant others must be assessed and plans for Family Time after adoption should be based on the child's needs (Adoption and Children Act 2002) and via their network of support.
- Family Time involving adoption and special guardianship will be formally considered as part of the adoption support plan. Adoption Counts manage such communication/contact, including "letterbox" arrangements.

## 9. Family Time and Children in Section 20 Care

- Section 20 cases and will not be supervised by the Family Time Service. If legal proceedings are being considered in the interim contact will be facilitated by the social care team. If following further assessment and a Legal Advice Meeting concludes the need to proceed, this is when a contact referral to Family Time Service is needed.

## 10. Contact in Public and Private Law Proceedings

- Court-directed contact must return to court if there is any need or suggestion for amendments, as legal advice will be needed.
- Children's Services do not facilitate, arrange or supervise contacts or contact handovers in private law cases. There are throughout Cheshire East a number of "Contact Centres" operated by voluntary sector agencies that support children and families in such circumstances.

## 11. The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

- The role of the IRO is to consider the arrangements for contact in relation to the parents, siblings and family members or significant others, whether these take into account the child's current wishes and feelings and whether any changes are needed to these arrangements. The voice of the child should be heard and evidenced. The IRO can make decisions about the need for a change of Family Time at a review, which can be challenged by the case holders' team manager within five days of the review. Further guidance is available within the Independent Reviewing Officers Handbook.
- Cheshire East Council has a commissioned service for Independent Visitors (IVs).

## Appendix 3

### Family Time Agreement

The purpose of this document is to outline the expectations, for maintaining positive family relationships for .....This is a fluid document and maybe subject to changes, as family time progresses. It is important that the focus remains on enabling Elsa to have positive relationships with her family, free of negativity and/or safeguarding concerns. The expectations laid out below are to ensure that all children and families are being treated fairly and consistently across the service. Frequency of family time is subject to review; it will be reviewed in line with care planning to ensure that it is positive and is sustainable for the child(ren).

### **Family Support Worker**

Family time will be supervised by ..... her contact number is.....

.....will supervise and support....., at all times inc. if she needs to go to the toilet. .... needs to be present and within view of all contact between ..... and family time attendees.

You must confirm your attendance with ..... via text, at..... If you are unable to get hold of .....please contact the Cared for Children's Team on 0300 123 5012 option 2 option 3.

### **Attendance**

1. Attendees must confirm their attendance with the family time supervisor on the day of the session, no later than .....**9 am**. Failure to do so will result in the session being cancelled, and you will not be offered an alternative session.
2. Attendees are expected to arrive 10 minutes before contact starts so that they are there to greet the child(ren) when they arrive. If you are running late, please contact the family time supervisor to let them know.
3. If you arrive later than 15 minutes, after your contact is due to start, your contact will be cancelled and an alternative date will not be offered.
4. No one else should attend family time that has not already been previously agreed by the Social Worker and Family Time Supervisor, inc. Partners, friends and/or extended family members.
5. If parent(s) do not attend 3 consecutive contact sessions without good reason, the contact will be reviewed/postponed, and a meeting will take place the social worker to review the expectations, frequency and duration of family time.

### **Venue**

1. If you are within court proceedings, it is likely that your session will take place within one of the family time centres. Unless a change of venue has been agreed by the family time supervisor and social worker during a family time planning meeting and is more suitable to meet the needs of the child.

2. For ..... contact will take place within the community when it is 1 person attending, if there are 2 or more attendee's contact will need to take place at the library or within a family time centre.
3. If family time takes place at a venue that requires payment i.e., a trip to the farm, out or a meal, then attendees are expected to fund the cost for the child(ren).

### **During Family Time Sessions**

1. The family time supervisor can choose to end the session at any time if they feel that:
  - a. The child(ren) is at risk of harm – emotional and/or physical.
  - b. The child(ren) is upset and/or are not enjoying contact.
  - c. Unknown people attend the contact session.
  - d. Adults are using inappropriate language and/or behaviour, that may cause the child(ren) upset.
4. Family time is an opportunity for the child to see their family, and the people who are important to their network. This must remain the focus, adults within this network must not discuss the wider issues with the child(ren) as this may cause the child(ren) upset.
5. Attendees are expected to provide a snack and a drink for the child(ren) unless previously discussed/agreed with the foster carer.
6. Photos of the child(ren)
  - a. must not be shared on social media, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat.
  - b. must not be shared/taken to make the other parent/carer jealous or to cause conflict.
  - c. must not be shared with unknown people, for example. Shown to people who are not part of the children's family.
7. Phone use must be kept to a minimum.

### **Cancellations**

1. Family time sessions maybe subject to cancellation due to the following reasons, this includes but is not limited to:
  - a. If a session falls on a bank holiday and/or court date.
  - b. Non-attendance – if you do not confirm your attendance by 9am on the day, the session will be cancelled.
  - c. If the child(ren) is on holiday with the foster carer and/or on a school trip.
  - d. If the child does not want to attend the session and/or the child(ren) is unwell.
  - e. If you are not able to attend due to illness and/or due attending other appointments.

The Local Authority will not offer alternative sessions due to cancellations; the only exception is if the Local Authority cancels a session. In this case the local authority will aim to provide a session at the next available date or may offer extended session times to give the time back.

*2; The Local Authority is open over the Christmas period to deal with urgent safeguarding concerns only. To allow all Cared for Children an equal opportunity to*

*see their parents and/or family during the festive period, contact session's will be offered on a pro-rotas basis dependent on how many contacts are normally scheduled per week . The Local Authority will not be providing additional sessions to give the time back following the festive period. Normal family time session will resume January onwards*

If you are attending family time sessions with other family members, you are responsible for them adhering to the expectations laid out with this document. By signing this document, you understand and agree to the expectations laid out above by the local authority. You understand that failure to comply with these expectations will result in a review of your family time, and as such you may have your sessions reduced and restrictions put in place.

Name:.....

Name:.....

Date:.....

Date:.....

## Appendix 4

**Contact Planning Meeting:**

**Date:**

**Attendees:**

<b>Child/Children's Name</b>	<b>LL Number</b>	<b>Contact With</b>	<b>Social Worker</b>	<b>Contact Worker</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Day and Time</b>

FT Agreement & COE signed:

Current Contact Plan:

Court/Review/Contact& Planning meeting dates:

What's working well:

What needs to happen next:

New Plan; if identified:

Transport arrangements:

Actions, Inc next Planning Meeting date :

- 

Minutes taken By: FT Unit Coordinator

Dated:

OFFICIAL

OFFICIAL