

Circular 12/2002 – Initial Visit/ Family Contact

5.2.2 Initial visit to family

With agreement from the family the initial visit to the prisoner should be preceded by a visit to the prisoner's family, other than where the SER or other information indicates that this would be inappropriate. This should take place **within 28 days** of the allocation of the case wherever possible. Where such a visit is judged to be inappropriate, the reasons for this must be recorded in the community based case record and countersigned by a line manager.

The purpose of this initial family visit is for the Supervising Officer to:

- introduce him/herself, explaining his/her role;
- outline the nature and implications of the sentence and supervision;
- explain the possible nature of future contact, including preparation of Home Background Reports, pre-release planning etc.;
- assess the impact on the family of, and their reaction to, the prison sentence; and
- extend an offer of appropriate assistance to the family in dealing with the consequences of the prison term (including access to housing or money advice, childcare supports, voluntary organisations and prison visiting assistance etc.)

5.2.3 Initial visit to prison/prisoner

The initial visit to the prisoner must take place **within the first 6 weeks** of sentence and should involve an interview with the prisoner and a meeting with the social worker in the prison, personal officer and any other relevant staff. The purpose of the visit with the prisoner is to underline the role of the supervising officer during sentence, the nature of obligations placed upon them following release, and to extend an offer of appropriate assistance from community based-throughcare services. The purpose of the initial meeting with the prison based social worker and other relevant staff at the establishment is to gain first hand knowledge of sentence planning for the prisoner. Where a visit cannot be made due to a refusal by the prisoner, details should be logged in the casefile and countersigned by a line manager. A schedule of visits should still be prepared and annual contact (or more frequent for high risk offenders) attempted thereafter. **The timescale for the initial visit to the prisoner also applies in relation to Extended Sentence prisoners.**

5.3.3 Arrangements to visit the prisoner should be made in conjunction with the social work unit in prison and include a subsequent two way meeting between the Supervising Officer and social worker in the prison. Before this meeting the views of the prison personal officer should be sought either by the prison

social worker on behalf of the Supervising Officer or by the Supervising Officer. It may be appropriate for the prison personal officer to be invited to attend. The purpose of this meeting is to:

- update one another as to current circumstances relating to the prisoner or his family;
- agree action points as necessary following the visit; and
- facilitate eventual pre-release planning.