

P&C COVID-19 EMERGENCY PLANNING HIGHLIGHT REPORT

SERVICE AREA:	Children and Safeguarding
REPORT AUTHOR:	Lou Williams
REPORTING PERIOD:	To week ending 24 th April

KEY ACTIVITY HEADLINES

- There has been little change since the last highlight report;
 - Our programme of prioritised face to face visiting to most vulnerable children and young people continues;
 - Other visiting taking pace virtually using social media;
 - Some visiting is taking place less frequently than previously where this is proportionate;
 - Links between early help services and community hubs established;
 - Schools continuing to offer excellent support to children who are vulnerable and those of key workers;
- The Adoption and Children [Coronavirus Amendment] Regulations were published on 24th April. These include some loosening of time requirements by which local authorities are required to complete some tasks, but in only limited areas. Examples include:
 - A relaxation in timescales for the arrangement of review panels in respect of formal complaints under the Children Act 1989;
 - A relaxation in the permissible timeframe for local authorities to respond to notification of private fostering arrangements;
- The areas of activity covered by these regulations are not part of the main areas of business for children's services, and while any relaxation is welcome, changes to the timeframes within which local authorities must respond to referrals and complete assessments would have a greater impact, particularly as we move out of the current lock-down arrangements.

RISKS / CHALLENGES (AND MITIGATION)

- Low rates of referrals of children continue, as is case nationally and regionally;
- Low numbers of vulnerable children accessing school places despite best efforts, as is case nationally and regionally. Mitigation for both includes asking safeguarding board and community hubs to ensure they are referring on as needed and positive that the Secretary of State has written [on 23rd April] to acknowledge these concerns and to emphasise his support in actions to increase school attendance by vulnerable groups;
- Likely to be a significant increase in referrals once services begin to return to normal and children are being seen by universal services;

WORKFORCE UPDATE

- Workforce availability steady in both authorities;
- Morale seems to remain generally good;
- We have reminded some parts of the workforce of the need to maintain social distancing rules while in offices.

FINANCIAL IMPACT (increase in costs / reduction in income)

Unchanged:

- A few placements where additional costs have been incurred have taken place, which are being captured through our access to resources team;

- Longer term the risks are that there is a shortage of Independent Fostering Agency placements as demand returns to usual levels, which may result in greater use of residential placements;
- There is also a risk that any spike in demand resulting from more children being referred after the lockdown period ends may require additional temporary staff in our front door and assessment teams.

RECOVERY ACTIVITY (plans being considered / future steps)

- The eastern region of association of directors of children's services is asking all local authorities to develop recovery plans to replace the self-assessment process. A think piece has been developed and shared with key Members.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Regular communications only as part of business as usual.