

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

**To:** Children and Young People's Committee

**Meeting Date:** 7 May 2020

**From:** Jonathon Lewis, Service Director for Education, and Lou Williams, Service Director for Children and Safeguarding

**Electoral division(s):** All

**Key decision:** No

**Purpose:** This report provides an update on:

- the Council's response to the current Coronavirus pandemic;
- immediate action taken by Education and Children's Services to respond to the pandemic and to ensure business continuity of critical services;
- the Council's initial approach to recovery.

**Recommendation:** The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note and comment on the progress made to date in responding to the impact of the Coronavirus.
- b) Note the contribution being made to support all children and especially those with additional vulnerabilities by members of staff in the Council and our partner organisations, including our schools and early years' settings.

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. In December 2019, cases of a new coronavirus were identified in the city of Wuhan in China. Since December, the virus has spread rapidly across the world and the World Health Organisation declared a global pandemic in March 2020. More than two million cases have now been reported worldwide and cases and deaths continue to rise in the UK.

## 2. UK RESPONSE

- 2.1. In the UK, the Government has developed a coronavirus COVID-19 action plan with the aim of 'flattening the curve' to reduce the peaks in pressure on NHS, social care services and wider society.
- 2.2. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March, the Prime Minister announced stringent new guidelines for 'lockdown' and 'social distancing' for three groups:
- 'Shielded Group' – around 1.5 million people nationally (we are expecting up to 30,000 people locally, including GP lists) have been identified in this extremely vulnerable category and have been told to "shield" themselves at home for 12 weeks.
  - Vulnerable people – people over 70, people with underlying health conditions and pregnant women have been advised to do all they can to minimise social contact.
  - Everyone else - was asked to work from home where possible - travelling to and from work only where absolutely necessary; avoid public transport; only leave home for essential food supplies and medical needs or to provide care to others and only to go out for necessities and exercise once a day.
- 2.3. Lockdown measures also stipulated that schools, libraries, places of worship, restaurants, bars, leisure facilities and other non-essential facilities should close immediately. Gatherings in public of more than two people who do not live together were prohibited, including funerals, and all social events including weddings and baptisms were cancelled. Parks could remain open for exercise but gatherings would be dispersed. The police have been given the power to fine and disperse where lockdown rules are not being adhered to.
- 2.4. The Coronavirus Bill (Bill 122 of 2019-21) was passed by Parliament on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020. The Bill is part of the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and is intended to enable the Government to respond to an emergency situation and manage the effects of a pandemic. The legislation, which is time-limited to two years, allows Government to switch on these new powers when they are needed, and, crucially, to switch them off again once they are no longer necessary, based on the advice of Chief Medical Officer.

The bill enables action in five key areas:

- increasing the available health and social care workforce – for example, by removing barriers to allow recently retired NHS staff and social workers to return to work;
- easing the burden on frontline staff – by reducing the number of administrative tasks they have to perform, enabling local authorities to prioritise care for people with the most pressing needs and allowing key workers to perform more tasks remotely and with

less paperwork. This has included easements in the Care Act but no relaxation of the Children and Families Act;

- containing and slowing the virus – by reducing unnecessary social contacts, for example through powers over events and gatherings and strengthening the powers of police;
- managing the deceased with respect and dignity – by enabling the death management system to deal with increased demand for its services; and
- supporting people – by allowing them to claim Statutory Sick Pay from day one, and by supporting the food industry to maintain supplies.

### **3. CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH LOCAL RESILIENCE FORUM'S REPONSE**

- 3.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 sets out a definition for 'emergency' which includes events which threaten serious damage to human welfare. The Act places an obligation upon emergency services and local authorities (defined as category 1 responders under the Act) to assess the risk of, plan, and exercise for emergencies, as well as undertaking Businesses Continuity Management.
- 3.2 The Civil Contingencies Act and its accompanying regulations provide that responders, through a local Resilience Forum have a collective responsibility to plan, prepare and communicate with the area they service for an emergency. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum is the collective body set up to carry out those responsibilities. Those responders are category 1 (as described above) and category 2 responders which include utility companies, transport organisations and others such as the Combined Authority.
- 3.3 The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum (CPLRF) has been approved and is now acting in accordance with the CPLRF Pandemic Influenza Plan which was signed off in January 2019. The plan requires a Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) to be set up to coordinate the multiagency response to the pandemic at a strategic level. This group had its first meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and has been meeting weekly. An Executive Group of the SCG (made up of category 1 responders) was set up on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 and has been meeting every week day. The SCG was initially co-chaired by Chris Mead, Detective Chief Superintendent of Cambridgeshire Constabulary, and Dr Liz Robin, Director of Public Health, but this position changed to Jan Thomas, Chief Operating Officer of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Gillian Beasley, Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) and Peterborough City Council (PCC), as it became apparent that key strategic planning would be focused on health, social and community issues. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 the Strategic Coordinating Group declared, under the Pandemic Influenza Plan, that COVID 19 was a major incident.
- 3.4 The SCG is supported in its work by a Tactical Silver Group chaired by Laura Hunt from Cambridgeshire Constabulary and this group in turn, is supported by a number of tactical sub-groups as follows:-

- Warn and Inform Subgroup leading on the joined up communications across the public services system, co-chaired by Christine Birchall, Head of Communications PCC/CCC, and Hayley Douglas, Head of Communications for Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue
- Community Reference Subgroup (leading the hub work) chaired by Adrian Chapman, Service Director Communities & Partnership PCC/CCC
- Excess Deaths Subgroup Chaired by Leigh Dunbar from PCC/CCC
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Cell chaired by Linda Sheridan from Public Health and Sarah Learney from Health
- Multi Agency Information Cell led by Leigh Allman, Detective Chief Inspector Cambridgeshire Constabulary
- Intelligence and analysis Cell chaired by Tom Barden from PCC/CCC
- Recovery Subgroup chaired by Jo Lancaster, Chief Executive of Huntingdonshire District Council
- Economic subgroup chaired by John T Hill, Chief Officer Business Board/ Director of Business and Skills at the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

3.5 Category 1 responders also set up their own command and control arrangements and for Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council there is a Gold Joint Management Team which meets virtually every weekday morning at 8.00am to determine practices and actions each day and to escalate for resolution to the daily Executive Strategic Coordinating Group which meets virtually at 11.30am each week day morning. A Tactical Working Group meets weekly and Operational Groups in each Directorate meet at least weekly and more frequently where required.

#### **4. CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL RESPONSE**

##### Governance

- 4.1 Whilst critical decisions on this emergency are taken within the arrangements set out in paragraph 3 above, the County Council needs to have proper arrangements for the transparent accountability and scrutiny of decisions taken within in this emergency.
- 4.2 Guidance from the Local Government Association for Councillors on COVID 19, together with advice from the Centre for Public Scrutiny on maintaining accountability of decision-making, has informed the approach which the County Council proposes to take and is summarised as follows:-
- Highlight reports of the activity of each main area of operation of the County Council for COVID-19 will be sent to all Members on a weekly basis, sent out on Monday of every week.
  - All Members will receive two daily reports, one a media report at 11.30am and one a report of the government's daily briefing which usually comes out early evening.
  - All Members will receive two weekly reports on the activities of the Strategic Coordinating Group.
  - Group Leader meetings will continue to take place on a fortnightly basis.
  - Friday Focus will continue to be issued to all staff and members containing a roundup of the week's information.

- Members will always be able to raise individual issues or concerns to officers in the usual way whether it be COVID-19 or other service-related issues.

4.3 In relation to decision making and scrutiny through committees the following arrangements were agreed: -

- At every service committee there will be a COVID-19 report summarising the key issues and attaching the last four weeks relevant highlight reports as well as updated information since the date of the last highlight report. This will allow the public to see all of the detailed activity and allow Members to ask questions and scrutinise the decisions and actions taken.
- General Purposes Committee will receive a COVID-19 report at every committee meeting including a finance report and a summary of key issues arising from the service committee reports.

4.4 Following the issue of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 which came into force on 4th April 2020, the Council also created a Virtual Meeting protocol which was agreed by Group Leaders and sent to all members. This will be reviewed after the first full council meeting once it has been tested and amendments made as necessary. The Council also considered the options for IT platforms for virtual meetings and after testing opted to use Zoom for public facing meetings and Microsoft teams for confidential or sensitive matters.

4.5 The Constitution provides for the executive management of the Council to be undertaken during periods of an emergency where normal decision making governance cannot be followed as a result of that emergency. As you will expect officers are currently having to make decisions on a daily basis that are not normal business as usual and do not fall within the parameters of the agreed business plan. As a consequence officers are entering in to commitments that will have financial consequences that are not covered by the annual budget agreed by Council in February. The making of such decisions within an emergency are covered within the Scheme of Financial Management which is part of the Constitution.

The following is the relevant extract:

*2.6 An Executive, Corporate or Service Director may incur expenditure which is essential to meet any immediate needs created by a sudden emergency, subject to this action being reported immediately to the Chief Executive and the Chief Finance Officer, and to the next General Purposes Committee.*

*2.7 When a sudden emergency arises, Executive, Corporate or Service Directors must keep a separate record of the essential expenditure incurred in connection with the emergency until advised by the Chief Finance Officer that separate records are no longer required.*

4.6 A protocol for the dealing of costs associated with the management of COVID 19 has been agreed and implemented. Any decision that will result in a financial implication in excess of £20k requires a business case to be approved. All items are reported to the Council's Management Team on a weekly basis so that there is visibility of the financial implication of the decisions being made. These items will be reported to each service committee and

summarised to GPC on a monthly basis with effect from the May cycle of meetings.

### Immediate Focus

- 4.7 Over the last three weeks, the immediate priorities for the Council have been to:
- a. Understand and make plans to mitigate against the potential impacts and key risks to delivery of effective critical services - both directly provided and commissioned services.
  - b. Ensure the sustainability of adult social care during the COVID-19 outbreak, particularly the links with planning and action in the NHS including response to new Hospital Discharge Guidance.
  - c. Ensure that effective business continuity arrangements are in place to maintain all other critical services.
  - d. Establish a coordination hub so that shielded and vulnerable self-isolators are supported with supplies of food, medicine, and other essential support.
  - e. Ensure that vulnerable children are supported during the pandemic, including work with schools and settings to ensure that arrangements are in place to support both vulnerable children and children of essential workers.
  - f. Optimise deployment of staff and volunteers to support critical activity.
  - g. Implement measures to protect and support our workforce in line with national guidelines whilst maintaining critical services and allowing effective emergency planning.
  - h. Maintain public trust and confidence by providing reassurance, frequent communication and to amplify the clear public health and government guidance.

## **5. SERVICE RESPONSE**

### **Summary of this month's highlight reports: Education Services**

- 5.1. Highlight reports from all areas of the Council and as detailed in paragraph 4.2 of this report are available from the link on the final page of this report. A summary of the activity is outlined below and a more detailed report will be brought to the committee on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 2020.
- 5.2. The delivery of education across Cambridgeshire has been challenging since the current crisis started. We have gone from schools and settings operating fully to the unpredicted opening during the Easter Holidays. Throughout this time, the response of the education sector has been superb (including staff within Education at CCC) with education leaders and staff going above and beyond to ensure that Education continues for pupils in Cambridgeshire.
- 5.3. The highlight reports outline the changing nature of the support we have provided and the challenges we have faced. Since the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, schools have only been open to critical workers children and vulnerable pupils (those with an Education, Health and Care Plan or those with a social work). The focus has remained however that these children should remain at home where it is safe to do so.

### School Improvement

- 5.4. With the outbreak of Covid-19, the Department for Education took the unprecedented step of cancelling all assessment from Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 5. There has

been significant coverage of how assessments at KS4 and KS5 will be undertaken. This will be through a combination of teacher assessment, mock grades and prior attainment. Further details of this process will be considered in the coming weeks. There will be no published pupil or school level data and there will be no national league tables for the academic year 2019/20. For primary age, there is currently no expectation of any data return although there may still be some consideration of teacher assessment for those pupils moving to a new school in September. This will be needed for the purposes of calculating primary and secondary progress measures if they continue as they are.

- 5.5. Our School Improvement team has been focused on supporting leaders in schools at this difficult time. We have contacted Heads on a regularly basis, supported them with continuous professional development for their staff, developed home learning materials and provided advice on a daily basis including the development of a Headteacher pack and a frequently asked questions document.
- 5.6. Our Virtual School has continued to provide advice and guidance to Designated Teachers for Children looked after. In Cambridgeshire, we have provided laptops to around 50 children in care who did not have access to remote learning. This has been funded from the pupil premium grant we receive.

#### Early Years

- 5.7. Early Years settings challenges mirror in many ways the challenges faced by schools. Our team have been providing excellent support to enable settings to remain open. We have provided support to continue to meet statutory requirements (paediatric first aid cover being a critical area) and advice on the financial challenge settings face including the furloughing of staff. Communication has also been critical with high quality guidance and interpretation of government legislation being shared. We have continued to provide full funding to all early years setting in Cambridgeshire throughout this current period, but financial viability of our settings going forward is going to be a key consideration.

#### Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND)

- 5.8. Our teams have continued to support the SEND process for Education Health and Care Plans and have provided support to schools and settings. We have developed a protocol for admitting pupils to schools through a risk assessment to ensure we undertake a full review of the child's need and the school's capacity to support. The Department for Education (DfE) has just published updated guidance on timescales for processes and how we should aim to meet the provision required by these children. We are currently considering our response to this. Staff in SEND have worked incredibly hard to provide high quality advice and guidance to schools and settings. This has included our staff working in schools to support with children that need additional support where there has been insufficient staff.
- 5.9. Owing to the current situation, we have stopped any consultation on changes to activities funded from the High Needs Block including the review of transport for after schools clubs. The deficit was around £17m at year end. Our request for a cash flow loan to the DfE remains unresolved and the delay in undertaking changes will only add further to our deficit which is likely to exceed £28m on the current trajectory. We continue to work on other aspects of the recovery plan and will share updates in coming meetings.

#### Education Capital & Place Planning

- 5.10. This service area has played an important role in supporting the ongoing activity of schools.

Our work on attendance ceased when schools closed but we have continued with the new admissions entry into schools in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Year 3 and Year 7 in September. In year admissions are currently on hold whilst schools are closed. The DfE recently gave us permission to run admissions appeals virtually and we are developing our protocol to do this.

- 5.11. We have also worked with Academy Trusts and the Diocese of Ely to develop contingency plans in case sickness levels increased and schools were forced to close. This included establishing a helpline for parents and schools if the sickness rates had continued to increase.
- 5.12. The impact on lockdown has meant that we do face delays in delivery of school buildings. There are currently no critical schemes in Cambridgeshire for delivering places for September 2020, but we continue to monitor and a full update will be brought to the committee meeting later in May.
- 5.13. Our Education safeguarding team has been essential in the Local Authority's (LA) support to schools and settings through this process. We have provided guidance and policies for schools and settings and we have establish a helpline to provide support to leaders especially as safeguarding arrangement have to be considered differently whilst schools are closed. We have continue to provide training online for Designated Safeguarding Leads.

#### **Future Planning for Education**

- 5.14. One of the strengths in Cambridgeshire has been the collaborative way we have worked together. There have been at least bi-weekly meetings with the CEOs of Academy Trusts and the Diocese of Ely and we have had daily communication with all schools. The LA has also held regular meetings with the Department for Education. We have collected a lot of information and feedback from schools to help shape our advice and support and help plan for the future.
- 5.15. We have been working hard to fully consider the implications of reopening. At the time of writing this report, we have no date for opening or how this might happen for example partial opening, part time education, ongoing home learning etc. We have however developed a re-opening planning tool which has been shared with schools which gives a framework for considering the implications for them. We have a range of meetings planned to support school leaders and will continue to provide advice and support on re-opening.
- 5.16. We are minded that there will be a range of issues to consider when schools restart. This includes challenges around mental health, behaviour and ongoing concerns around sickness and pupils/staff that are shielding. We will start to develop a plan for how the LA will support these challenges. An early focus has been supporting parents to get ready for school including ensuring their children are sleeping well and are ready to come back into the classroom.

#### **Summary of this month's highlight reports: Children's Services**

- 5.17. Copies of the highlight reports from Children's Services are also available from the link on the final page of this report.
- 5.18. Managers across children's services, from early help through to children's social care, have RAG-rated all children and young people open to the service, in order that we can identify those for whom we have the most significant concerns.



- 5.19. Children, young people and their families are only visited on a face to face basis where this is necessary to ensure that any risks are addressed. Visits are otherwise taking place virtually, using social media and similar.
- 5.20. For children and young people in care, face to face visits are only taking place where it is felt necessary to ensure that a placement does not come to an unplanned end.
- 5.21. Many families who have children with complex disabilities are worried about the wellbeing of their children and are particularly anxious about home visits or accessing short breaks. Our staff take such anxieties into account and would only insist on face to face visiting where there were serious safeguarding concerns.
- 5.22. Group activities including, for example, those run by our child and family centres, have ceased. Families are being signposted to on-line support resources, while some of our child and family centre workers have posted some innovative on-line content including reading of story books, which families can continue to access.
- 5.23. There are good links between our early help services at a district level and the district hubs. This enables the hubs to raise any worries they may have about vulnerable families directly with our services, and we can provide support as needed.
- 5.24. Since the start of the lock-down period, the number of children being referred to us has dropped significantly. This is not surprising, given that the most common source of referrals are from our schools. We see a similar reduction in referrals in the school holidays. This does mean, however, that we can expect to see a significant rise in referrals once the schools return, as we do after the summer school holiday in particular.
- 5.25. The relative lack of visibility of children and young people is of course a concern, and one that will increase the longer the lock-down continues. As noted above, we continue to ensure that we do all we can to support our most vulnerable children and young people. Our schools are also playing an important role here, not only by providing places, but by keeping in touch with pupils who are vulnerable.
- 5.26. As is the case nationally, attendance at schools by pupils from vulnerable groups is relatively low. Attendance from these groups, while encouraged, remains voluntary and advice is not to attend except where the assessment is that risks in the home outweigh other considerations. Where there is continued non-attendance where our assessment is that this will significantly increase risks to a child, we will consider whether we need to take other actions. Where children from vulnerable groups are not in school, our services and the schools work together in order to ensure the continued wellbeing of the children.
- 5.27. Where children who have not previously met the criteria for vulnerability as set out in the initial guidance are in families where pressures appear to be escalating, schools have agreed to use their discretion in order to offer places to the children. This has helped to ensure that children open to early help have not escalated into children's social care services.
- 5.28. Where children are currently the subject of care proceedings and have been having supervised contact with parents, much of this contact has moved to being virtual. This is to ensure the continuing safety of parents, children and foster carers.
- 5.29. Until now at least, we have been fortunate in that the virus has not had any significant impact on children and young people in our foster placements. Similarly, there have not been placements coming to an unexpected end for children placed with Independent

Fostering Agency carers, and no children's home has said that it cannot provide care to children in placement because staff have become unwell, for example.

- 5.30. Planning for children is more difficult, however. This means that children who might have been planned to move to a relative under a Special Guardianship Order may be waiting in care for a little longer.
- 5.31. While we are not able to operate any face to face participation events, arrangements are in place to provide children and young people with additional ways to keep in contact and to raise any issues that may be causing them concern. Their social workers continue to make visits, albeit that many are now virtual. Use of the Mind of My Own Application remains healthy, and many children and young people prefer to use this as a means of communication. In addition, our participation service has established some dedicated channels to ensure that children and young people in care have additional lines of communication.
- 5.32. Feedback from children and young people in care and care leavers to date has been mostly positive. Many have said that they have enjoyed having more time to spend in placements with carers and other children; most have been engaging in on-line learning, but a number are now saying they are missing school, friends and routine. While children in care are seen as a vulnerable group, many do not see themselves that way and do not want to be grouped with vulnerable pupils. Guidance is that vulnerable children should in any case remain at home, unless it is better for them to be in school. For the majority of our children, settled in foster placements, the expectation would be that they would remain at home.
- 5.33. Some of our care leavers have found the lock-down to be more difficult; we have provided additional support to a number, including making sure that they have sufficient food, and that we stay in regular contact. This is where schemes to provide lap-tops to care leavers who do not have them can also help; it is isolation that many care leavers find difficult even in more usual times.
- 5.34. While there have been a few examples of where providers have sought to increase fees on what would appear to be fairly spurious grounds, for the most part the market for placements for children and young people in care is working reasonably well. There has been some reduction in the availability of foster placements through Independent Fostering Agencies where carers have needed to isolate and similar, but this has not yet had a significant impact.
- 5.35. We do have concerns that this situation may still yet change, depending on the course of progression of the virus. We are also concerned that as the lock-down eases and children return to school and early years' settings, we will see a sudden increase in referrals, a proportion of which may relate to children who need to come into the care system. As this will be happening in every authority in the country at the same time, it may be the case that this translates into significant pressure on placement availability, particularly if the lock-down eases while some fostering households are continuing to need to self-isolate.
- 5.36. Such a scenario could result in an increased use of residential placements which are very high cost, in turn exposing the authority to financial risk as a result of pressure on the placement budgets.
- 5.37. We will obviously continue to monitor this position very closely, and identify any emerging pressures quickly. In the meantime, our best long term solution to lack of placement availability nationally is to continue our focus on fostering recruitment, which remains a

priority throughout this period and beyond.

- 5.38. Our staff and managers have shown exceptional commitment through this period; most are working from home, undertaking visits to children either virtually as described above, or directly where the risks mean that this approach is needed. Small teams of staff are also based in the key offices, in order that they can respond to any urgent situations.
- 5.39. In general morale is high even though the current climate of virtual visiting and social distancing is at odds with the approach that most staff working with children and families apply – that of relationship based work and developing a close relationship with children which means, certainly for younger children, a degree of physical contact.
- 5.40. For some members of our staff, those who chair child protection conferences or reviews of children in care, there have been additional challenges associated with running sensitive meetings that can have a significant number of participants virtually. Running any meeting in this way presents challenges, doing so while ensuring that vulnerable parents and/or children and young people can also participate is particularly difficult.
- 5.41. Particularly in some of my earlier highlight reports, I expressed some concerns about the potential impact on children's services of decisions made by other agencies and in particular by health and youth justice agencies.
- 5.42. As the lock-down period commenced, health agencies were understandably heavily focused on managing the expected surge in demand from adults who were severely unwell. In this context, there were indications that children's health facilities might be needed – wards in hospitals for example, while children and young people would need to be diverted from emergency departments. While this focus by health agencies was and remains entirely understandable, we had some concerns about the impact for some vulnerable young people and particularly, those with mental health difficulties.
- 5.43. As things have progressed, these concerns have not been realised and support to vulnerable young people has continued in broadly similar ways to prior to the lock-down. That said, we are continuing to be alert to the cumulative consequences of all agencies in a multi-agency risk or child in need plan switching to virtual or reduced frequency of visiting, and we will continue to keep arrangements under review, particularly if the lock-down in its current format continues beyond the current period.
- 5.44. A small number of young people have been released from detention early as part of measures to reduce risks related to Covid-19 in the secure estate. The majority of these have been able to return home to parents; in a very small number of cases this early release has resulted in us needing to identify placements for them. Costs of these are being captured as part of the overall monitoring of additional costs associated with managing the current situation.
- 5.45. The Government issued The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020. These include a number of relaxations to the statutory expectations placed on Children's Social Care services. The regulations also acknowledge changes to practice that has taken place, confirming that these changes are in line with the revised statutory requirements.
- 5.46. The regulations have relaxed expectations about timescales in some areas such as, for example, in the requirement to contact families who are privately fostering a child, which should now happen 'as soon as is reasonably practical'. Some of the regulations relating to temporary foster cares have also been relaxed, as have the requirements in relation to

adoption and fostering panels.

- 5.47. Meanwhile, the regulations acknowledge that visits to children may now take place virtually, which is in line with the expectations in place around social distancing and the lock-down more generally. The regulations have also relaxed expectations in other areas, including in the holding of review meetings. Our position is that we will maintain arrangements such as these as we do not think it is in the best interests of children to adopt such flexibilities.

### **Future Planning for Children's Social Care**

- 5.48. As noted above, volumes of referrals of children are relatively low in Cambridgeshire, as they are across the country. At one level, this is not surprising; the majority of referrals come from schools, and only about 1 in 10 children overall are in school.
- 5.49. There are some emerging indications that incidents of domestic abuse are increasing. More families are experiencing financial hardship and there are undoubtedly likely to be a number of families where increased tensions have resulted from being confined to home for long periods.
- 5.50. There are also concerns about the difficulty that all children and young people are likely to face in readjusting to the routine of the school day, and to being back in a classroom setting. It is only likely that these difficulties will be experienced most acutely by children who are already disadvantaged.
- 5.51. Estimates for the length of time it might take for systems to return to some sort of normality and for the impact of this period to pass seem to be settling on an estimate of up to two years. The extent to which the rebuilding of services and increased support needed by vulnerable children and young people will receive additional funding remains to be seen. There is little doubt that there will be a great deal of competition for any additional funds, which is also likely to be in a very challenging economic context.
- 5.52. On the other side of the coin is the incredible extent to which communities have come together to offer support the most vulnerable. This has brought to life the potential of the Think Communities approach, where we enable community facing groups to come together to help to support the needs of the community as a whole. There is the real potential for this response to Covid-19 to form the foundations of a new and sustainable approach to enriching and supporting community life.
- 5.53. The Association of Directors of Children's Services will be engaging with Ofsted to discuss on-going arrangements for the monitoring, support to improvement and inspection of children's services. Cambridgeshire received a focused visit in February 2020, meaning that we are unlikely to see any further inspection activity in the calendar year. But as a sector, we need to engage in dialogue with Ofsted about how the inspection framework may need to be revised in order to take account of the impact of Covid-19.
- 5.54. While the formal launch of the Family Safeguarding approach took place in February, we have yet to recruit all of our adult practitioners. Progress is being made, particularly in respect of domestic abuse workers, but this will inevitably be delayed by the current situation. This in turn will mean that the model will become fully functioning at a later point in the year.
- 5.55. The delays in planning for children in care, briefly mentioned above, and the delay to the implementation of Family Safeguarding may have an on-going impact on the targets to reduce the overall number of children in care. This, combined with a possible shortage of

placements, make the delivery of the savings targets built into the children's placement budgets more difficult to achieve.

## **6. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 6.1 Given the significant impact of COVID-19 on both the Council's immediate operations and its longer term achievement of strategic objectives a COVID-19 risk log has been developed. This is split into three sections:
- A short-term risk log for the internal-management of the County Council's response to COVID19.
  - A longer-term risk log for the strategic-management of the delivery of the County Council's objectives arising from the current event.
  - A review of major projects to identify which are critical to the County Council with a risk management action plan against each of these projects.
- 6.2 The immediate priority has been to develop the internal COVID-19 risk log which has five themes – infrastructure, finance, people, operations, reputation. These themes have been cross referenced to the existing Corporate Risk Register and to Service Committee/ Directorate Risk Registers. Each of these themes has a number of trigger events and corresponding controls and actions. The internal COVID-19 risk register has been uploaded to the GRACE system and will be reviewed by the Joint Management Team weekly from 17<sup>th</sup> April 2020.
- 6.3 The strategic risk register is being developed next and will inform the recovery phase. The PESTELO approach has been applied in order to structure our controls and actions, this takes into account 7 themes: Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, Legal and Organisational. Management of strategic risks is likely to be widely dispersed through the organisation, its partners and the Cambridgeshire system.
- 6.4 We have also reviewed all of our critical projects and ensured that risk management plans take into account potential impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic.

## **7. RECOVERY**

- 7.1 As a Council we have been at the forefront of leading the response to the pandemic, diverting most of our effort to ensuring that the public and businesses are supported through what is an unprecedented emergency in modern times. We have a significant degree of influence and accountability for the public's experience of living and working in Cambridgeshire. Our ambition, our relationships with system partners and our significant investment in change and innovation over the past few years, makes us very well placed to contribute to the recovery and redesign that will be required in Cambridgeshire in the coming months and years.
- 7.2 It is very likely that the Council and the services it delivers may need to be different once we have dealt with the immediate response required by the crisis and when we have understood the future needs of Cambridgeshire's society as it is re-established post COVID-19. While significant levels of local authority resources are redirected to the front line and current

emergency, it is important to ring fence capacity and expertise to start planning for aftermath and recovery as quickly as possible.

7.3 To plan for these phases, the Joint Management Team has started to build a recovery framework, with the first steps being:

- identifying the risks, both the immediate operational risks and the after-effects that could destabilise organisational and financial sustainability, service delivery, communities and suppliers;
- forecasting the social and economic impact of different scenarios to the Council and communities;
- capturing learning and opportunities and thinking about the changed behavioural aspects that we might wish to permanently embed (for example community resilience and support, climate impacts during lockdown, changed attitudes to travel and agile working);
- planning for the reintroduction of services that have been suspended during the pandemic.

7.4 A number of officers including the Deputy Chief Executive, Executive Director Place and Economy, Director of Business Improvement and Director of Education are also involved in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum Recovery Group, which is chaired by Chief Executives from Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils.

## **8. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

8.1 The current Coronavirus pandemic will have both an immediate and a longer term effect on all of the Council's priorities. The impacts will be monitored and managed through our risk logs and recovery plans and will feed into the annual review of Council strategy.

## **9. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic is likely to increase over the next few weeks and the lasting impacts will affect the Council and the people of Cambridgeshire for much longer. We are predicting that the impact of the pandemic and lockdown will result in a rise in referrals to children's services as the pressures on families increase and that demand may also grow in adult services as the effects of interrupted care on chronic conditions emerge. It is essential that we plan for an extended period of response and recovery.

9.2 Although the Council's immediate focus is on the significant role we play in minimising the impact of COVID-19, we must also start planning now for the support that will be needed to help Cambridgeshire recover as quickly as possible.

9.3 The current allocation of emergency funding from Government - including the additional £1.6bn announced this Saturday - will cover some of the additional costs and loss of income arising from the crisis and is very welcome, however it is unlikely to be enough. Our discussions with Government have indicated that conversations will continue as the full financial impacts of this pandemic become better understood. We have started to model the likely impact of this on current and future budgets and will continue to refine and adjust this

modelling as we understand the pressures created by the pandemic.

- 9.4 The current level of complexity and demand is unprecedented and the Council has responded by taking decisive action and by working at pace with partners and communities to ensure that the most vulnerable people across Cambridgeshire have the support they need. At the same time, we have continued to run the business and to fulfil our statutory responsibilities. The Joint Management Team is hugely grateful to the Council's committed and hardworking staff who have made this possible. Action plans to ensure our workforce stays resilient and feels well supported are in place and the mental and physical wellbeing of our workforce remains a priority.

| <b>Implications</b>  | <b>Officer Clearance</b> |
|--|--------------------------|
|  |                          |
| <b>Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?</b>   |                          |
|  |                          |
| <b>Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement?</b> |                          |
|  |                          |
| <b>Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law?</b>        |                          |
|  |                          |
| <b>Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?</b>  |                          |
|  |                          |
| <b>Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?</b>  |                          |
|  |                          |
| <b>Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?</b>                                   |                          |
|  |                          |
| <b>Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health</b>   |                          |

| <b>Source Documents</b>   | <b>Location</b>                          |
|---|--|
| <b>Service highlight reports for all Directorates sent to Members weekly.</b> | <a href="#"><u>Highlight Reports</u></a> |