

SERVICE HIGHLIGHT REPORT – COVID-19 AND KEY SERVICE UPDATES

SERVICE AREAS:	Children and Safeguarding
REPORT AUTHOR:	Lou Williams
REPORTING PERIOD:	December 2020
LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Part 1 - COVID-19

NEW GUIDANCE AND IMPACT

- The lockdown established in November was eased at the beginning of December, with both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire moving into the tier 2 initially.
- There have of course been further changes affecting both authorities since then, and while this report covers December, it is relevant to note that as of the Prime Minister's announcement on 4th January, there is national lockdown in place with measures broadly similar to tier 4, with the important exception that schools will remain closed except for vulnerable children and young people and the children of key workers.
- Throughout these changes in respect of restrictions resulting from Covid-19, our priority has been and remains the continuation of services to vulnerable children and young people in the community and in our care. Our aim has been to maintain the majority of our services as 'business as usual', recognising their central importance in safeguarding vulnerable children and young people, while seeking to ensure that our staff, foster carers, and the families we work with, are protected from the virus as far as is possible.

NEW CHALLENGES AND ACTIVITY

- Children's services operated a skeleton service for urgent matters between Xmas and New Year. This was managed well, with the staffing capacity in place sufficient to meet need. That said, those staff on duty between Xmas and New Year reported a busier period than was the case last year.
- We are seeing an increase in the volume of requests for support for children and young people for our early help services in both authorities. This was reported in the last of these briefing notes, and the trend has continued.
- Early help is delivered in very different ways across the two authorities. In Cambridgeshire there is a sizeable directly managed service that provides early help support alongside key partners including health and school colleagues.
- In Peterborough, there is a small directly employed team that helps coordinate the support offered by those same key partners, supplemented by a range of commissioned services that provide additional support, usually where families have more significant needs.
- In both authorities, early help services are provided by a system of partner agencies working closely together – schools and health partners as already noted, but also registered social landlords, the voluntary sector and others.
- Covid-19 has had a significant impact on all partners in the early help system, at a time when the volume of demand has also been increasing. The effect of this has been particularly felt in Peterborough where there is no directly delivered early help service to support the work of partner agencies as there is in Cambridgeshire. Commissioned services in Peterborough are largely at capacity, and so we are not able to meet increasing demand through this route.
- We had identified that early help services were an area that were likely to come under additional pressure as a result of the pandemic, and funding bids were prepared to address the issue. Funds are now being drawn down in Peterborough to establish some additional capacity.
- The position in Cambridgeshire remains under continuous review, but services are managing at present.
- As noted in the last highlight report, while numbers of referrals into children's social care in each authority appears to have remained in line with previous years, there is a clear increase in complexity of presenting needs.

- In both authorities, we have seen small increases in the number of children subject to child protection plans, to just over 250 in Peterborough and just over 400 in Cambridgeshire from around 200 and just over 300 in Cambridgeshire.
- In Cambridgeshire, this increase in numbers on child protection plans has been seen in conjunction with a significant reduction in the numbers of children in care and in care proceedings. It is usual to see numbers on child protection plans increase as numbers in care reduce. That said, this would not explain all of the increase.
- In Peterborough, numbers of care have increased slightly from longer term trends, and the increase in child protection is more clearly associated with Covid-19.
- Increased numbers on child protection plans is not only about more becoming subject to plans; it is also a reflection of it taking longer to work with families to enable them to address their key challenges to the extent that it is possible to remove a child from a child protection plan. While virtual working has been a great benefit in some areas, it has been less effective at supporting families with the greatest needs. While the overall work remains effective, the lack of the same degree of face to face and in-person group work means that the interventions have taken longer.
- Children in care numbers have continued to reduce [Cambridgeshire] or remained broadly steady with a small increase compared with long term trends [Peterborough]. We have, however, seen an increase in the numbers of young people with the most complex needs among the populations of children in care in both authorities. This is leading to higher costs in both, since while the numbers of young people we are discussing here are very small, unit costs for specialist placements are very high.

RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

Our key priority is to ensure that we are able to respond to any changes in demand and need among vulnerable families, children and young people, including exploring how community based approaches can be harnessed to meet increased need and build local resilience.

As we move into the new lockdown, our emphasis remains to continue to ensure that we provide the support that vulnerable children and young people require, while as far as possible, ensuring the safety of all concerned.

DECISIONS MADE SINCE LAST REPORTING PERIOD

None

NEW COVID-19 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS SINCE LAST REPORTING PERIOD

- There has been a small number of young people with particularly complex needs who have come into the care system in both authorities. This has had an impact on placement budgets and is likely to continue to do so into the next financial year.

WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

- The workforce has remained committed and highly motivated to continue to deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

COMMUNICATIONS

- None specific

Part 2 – BUSINESS AS USUAL ACTIVITY

KEY SERVICE UPDATES – INTERNAL / EXTERNAL

- As noted in the last highlight report, a consultation process in respect of the delivery of clinical services to children and young people in care over and above that which is available through commissioned Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services is continuing.
- There have been some very detailed papers submitted by staff and a response to these is due on 14th January 2021.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

- None specific at current time; business planning processes are taking place in both authorities as per usual processes, although the potential financial pressures on services are more difficult to predict for obvious reasons.
- As noted above, some additional funding is being drawn down to support early help in Peterborough;
- As also noted above, a small increase in numbers of young people in the care system with very complex needs is having an impact on placement budgets.

ANY RELEVANT/SIGNIFICANT PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

- Performance information is indicating an overall continued improving picture in Cambridgeshire in terms of demand management, and a reasonably stable picture in Peterborough with the exception of some increasing demand in both authorities on early help services, as outlined above.

UPCOMING ISSUES & HORIZON SCANNING AREAS

- Further work is now taking place to ensure that the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and new lockdown remains effective.