

SERVICE HIGHLIGHT REPORT – COVID-19 AND KEY SERVICE UPDATES

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

Part 1 - COVID-19

NEW GUIDANCE AND IMPACT

- The priority for the service has remained the safeguarding and support of vulnerable children and young people, while doing all we can to also ensure staff safety;
- We have continued to visit children and young people in line with usual expectations throughout the lockdown period in November, with exceptions being made only for children in care and in settled placements at some distance from either authority;
- A small number of children's staff are included in the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable category and have been working at home throughout.

NEW CHALLENGES AND ACTIVITY

- Since the return of children and young people to school in September, there have been some growing indications of growing demand on our early help services across both local authorities;
- In Cambridgeshire, we have seen much higher numbers of children and young people accessing early help assessments over the last 8 weeks. This is likely to lead to an increased demand for these services over coming weeks and months;
- In Peterborough, additional pressures on schools and health services in particular mean that there has been less capacity to undertake early help support. Our commissioned services are at capacity, and we are exploring how we can make more capacity available from January 2021;
- For children's social care in each authority, numbers of referrals have remained broadly in line with other years; there does seem to be an increase in complexity, however;
- That said, demand as measured by things like numbers of children in care and open cases has remained relatively stable in Peterborough and showed continued decline in Cambridgeshire. Numbers on child protection plans have increased slightly in both authorities; in Cambridgeshire this is more connected to reducing numbers of children in care proceedings than the impact of Covid-19, however.

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.

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 Peterborough over the summer months. This has had an impact on placement budgets and is likely to continue to do so into the next financial year. These are covid-19 related costs that have arisen because of a lack of access to other forms of support during the last lockdown and beyond.

WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

- The workforce has remained committed and highly motivated to continue to deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable children and young people;
- As noted above, there are some indications of increased demand in respect of early help, and this may require some drawing down of funds originally identified as being likely to be needed in Peterborough. In Cambridgeshire, there is no indication yet that demand will exceed capacity, but this may change over coming weeks and months.

COMMUNICATIONS

- None specific

Part 2 – BUSINESS AS USUAL ACTIVITY

KEY SERVICE UPDATES – INTERNAL / EXTERNAL

- Cabinet in Peterborough and Children and Young People Committee in Cambridgeshire approved the arrangements in respect of the Regional Adoption Agency, which will serve both authorities and be hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council;
- Alongside these changes, consultation on developing an increasingly shared approach to the recruitment and assessment of fostering households has concluded and will be implemented in due course;
- The consultation in respect of developing a fully shared QA service has also concluded and is in the process of being implemented;
- A consultation regarding clinical staff and support for children and young people in care is also underway.

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.

ANY RELEVANT/SIGNIFICANT PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

- Performance information is indicating a 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

- Indications of continued increased demand in early help from January 2021.