

SERVICE HIGHLIGHT REPORT – COVID-19 AND KEY SERVICE UPDATES

SERVICE AREAS:	Children and Safeguarding
REPORT AUTHOR:	Lou Williams
REPORTING PERIOD:	March 2021
LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Part 1 - COVID-19

NEW GUIDANCE AND IMPACT

- Children's services have continued to prioritise face to face visits to children and young people about whom we have the greatest concerns throughout this lockdown period;
- We have continued to prioritise the availability of support to families and children and young people at all levels of need, although some of this support has moved to virtual only for the lockdown;
- As previously, some virtual working has proved more effective for some children, young people and their families;
- The most significant change has of course been the re-opening of schools to all pupils. All indications are that this has gone as smoothly – and indeed more smoothly – than many expected;
- As lockdown restrictions continue to [hopefully] ease, we aim to open more of our service to direct face to face engagement, while ensuring that the lessons learned about the benefits of virtual working in some circumstances are maintained.

NEW CHALLENGES AND ACTIVITY

- 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.
- Many of these requests have been in relation to things like families struggling to manage the behaviour of children within their homes over the prolonged period of lockdown. There has also been an increase in requests for support for young people reporting anxieties about exams and isolation from peers.
- It is to be hoped, of course, that the return of the great majority of pupils to schools will make a big difference in addressing these issues.
- Schools are also likely to need some increased support over the coming weeks and months, however, as they will be needing to support children to catch up on learning in a context where many children will be having to become used to the discipline of classroom learning once more.
- As schools re-open, it is likely that there will be some increase in numbers referred into our service for support and additional services.
- We expect this to be most noticeable in the period after the Easter break, but do not expect the increase to be any more pronounced than the usual one following the long summer holiday.
- As noted in previous reports, numbers of children on child protection plans have increased in both authorities. This is partly the result of it being more challenging to undertake direct work with parents who have complex needs when much of that work is being completed remotely.
- We are looking forward to a time when we can once more undertake in-person group work with parents with, for example, substance misuse issues as our learning has been that virtual working in areas such as this takes longer to complete successfully. We would expect to see numbers of children subject to child protection plans reducing again once we are able to undertake more face to face direct work.
- 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
<p>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.</p> <p>As we are now hopefully moving out of the period of lockdown, our emphasis will be on reopening services as safely as we can, while continuing to retain the learning about the advantages of virtual working for some families – particularly in areas around lower level parenting advice and support.</p>
DECISIONS MADE SINCE LAST REPORTING PERIOD
None
NEW COVID-19 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS SINCE LAST REPORTING PERIOD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The workforce has remained committed and highly motivated to continue to deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.
COMMUNICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None specific

Part 2 – BUSINESS AS USUAL ACTIVITY
KEY SERVICE UPDATES – INTERNAL / EXTERNAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Regional Adoption Agency between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has now launched successfully. The consultation in relation to the clinical offer for our children in care has been completed, and we are implementing the new service and offer.
FINANCIAL ISSUES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As noted above, our priority for the coming months is to prepare our services for the gradual move out of lockdown planned for the coming months.