

## SERVICE HIGHLIGHT REPORT – COVID-19 AND KEY SERVICE UPDATES

<b>SERVICE AREAS:</b>	Children and Safeguarding
<b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b>	Lou Williams
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<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY:</b>	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

### Part 1 - COVID-19

#### NEW GUIDANCE AND IMPACT

- The new lockdown took effect on 6<sup>th</sup> January, and has meant that we are back into significant restrictions for our staff and service users. Schools have been supportive in both LAs in enabling vulnerable children in our service to attend school where possible, but this is, of course, the most significant impact for them now and in the longer term.
- 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

- Contacts in January have risen for Cambridgeshire but slightly fallen for Peterborough. Flow into the service has been managed tightly to keep open cases at reasonable levels, but this has involved a lot of work in the Front Door. Some partners are finding it challenging to support the volume of work in this area.
- We continue to see an increase in the volume of requests for support for children and young people for our early help services in both authorities, and Early Help Assessments have increased particularly in Cambridgeshire. Some of this is a positive response to training on the Early Help case management system, but it also indicates an increase in need. Covid 19 funds are now being drawn down in Peterborough and we are actively recruiting to roles to ensure high level support continues to be delivered.
- Child and Family Centres have continued to deliver services in both areas despite the lockdown. These have been carefully risk assessed and much delivery is online, but we have prioritised under 1s especially and this has been very well received.
- In both authorities, the numbers of children subject to Child Protection plans continues to climb, with 268 now in Peterborough and 431 in Cambridgeshire. This reflects the ongoing complexity of work, but is starting to create pressures in caseloads for Social Workers and impacting on the number of Child Protection Case Conference Chairs needed to manage the demand. This will be monitored closely and additional business cases completed as needed to address any ongoing issues.
- In both authorities, we also continue to work closely with young people at risk of exploitation or criminal activity. There is a worrying trend in terms of the deterioration of the mental health of a number of these highly vulnerable individuals, and we are looking as a partnership about how best to meet these health needs during this period.
- Very positive news has been the agreement of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to support the Local Authority with extended funded for the SAFE Team. This has been a time limited grant funded team that works intensively with young people at risk of or involved in criminal exploitation. Robust monitoring is evidencing early indications of effectiveness in respect of young people's safety, reduced involvement in crime and exploitation. We are also starting to see an encouraging impact on engagement in education and other positive outcomes for young people. The extension will allow further evaluation of sustained outcomes over a longer period and we are looking forward to continuing to work with partners to reduce the impact of offending and exploitation for young people and the community.
- Finally, we are due to publish an overview strategy document in relation to a year's development in partnership with Isos consultants. This has been a piece of partnership work reviewing the Early Help

offer across both authorities, considering the needs of 9-12 year olds (who rarely benefit from services specific to their needs and transitions to different services and environments) and considering how best to develop and integrate our offer to adolescents in this rapidly changing context. Timescales have been impacted by the pandemic, and we are very grateful to partners who have continued to prioritise their contribution to this important work. We plan to have proposals ready for consideration by the end of the financial year, and anticipate an exciting if challenging implementation phase over the following 6 to 9 months.

#### **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.

Now that we are in 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. We are starting to plan for the anticipated end of the lockdown in early March, and anticipate that this will lead to a steady increase in referrals (rather than a sudden spike as predicted from the first lockdown).

As highlighted above, we are working to bolster our Early Help provision in anticipation of the growing needs of our families, and will be working on our Early Help, Older Children and Adolescent strategy to take forward new ways of working.

#### **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. There is an increasing pressure on suitable placements for adolescents and this is also contributing to the cost of placements, although overall numbers remain stable.

#### **WORKFORCE CHALLENGES**

- The workforce has remained committed and highly motivated to continue to deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable children and young people; vaccination of frontline staff and foster carers has had a real impact on morale and will increase our resilience in the next few weeks.
- Recruitment to qualified and more senior roles continues to be extremely challenging; we are trialling a new social media strategy and targeting specific roles to see if this has any impact.

#### **COMMUNICATIONS**

- None specific

#### **Part 2 – BUSINESS AS USUAL ACTIVITY**

##### **KEY SERVICE UPDATES – INTERNAL / EXTERNAL**

- The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adoption Agency (RAA) launched in December 2020, and is already demonstrating a more focused grip on adopter assessment and early matching.
- The clinician consultation has been concluded, and the new Clinical Service for Children in and on the edge of Care will be launched shortly. This will provide support to both CIC in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire.

- The Family Group Conferencing Service is now operating successfully across both authorities.

#### **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.
- There will be review of the need for more temporary Child Protection chairs.
- 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.