

## P&C COVID-19 EMERGENCY PLANNING HIGHLIGHT REPORT

<b>SERVICE AREA:</b>	Children and Safeguarding
<b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b>	Lou Williams
<b>REPORTING PERIOD:</b>	To week ending 1 <sup>st</sup> May 2020

### KEY ACTIVITY HEADLINES

- There has been little change since the last highlight report;
  - Our programme of prioritised face to face visiting to most vulnerable children and young people continues;
  - Other visiting taking place virtually using social media;
  - Some visiting is taking place less frequently than previously where this is proportionate;
  - Links between early help services and community hubs established;
  - Schools continuing to offer excellent support to children who are vulnerable and those of key workers;
- As noted in the last highlight report, the Government published regulations that provide children's services with some flexibilities in relation to our statutory duties;
- Most of these relaxations are to areas that are not part of our core activities including, for example, relaxations on the assessment and approval process in relation to adopters. There were some relaxations about which there has been some media attention including those that related to the flexibility to delay reviews of the progress of children's placements with foster carers. We will not be amending our processes in these areas, as we have not encountered staffing or other issues that would lead us to need to relax these processes.

### RISKS / CHALLENGES (AND MITIGATION)

- **Low rates of referrals of children continue, as is case nationally and regionally**  
 This is an interesting issue, since until now we have always had too many referrals about children and young people. Often these are from agencies who think we need to know about something, even if they realise that we will not do anything about the information.  
 Prior to the lock-down the safeguarding children board facilitated a number of workshops with partners because however well-intentioned this is, the result is that we have to spend a great deal of time sifting through information about children that is not relevant, to identify those who do need require a service from us.  
 The current rate of referrals continues to be low, but equally we do not want to return to the position prior to the current situation where we had far too many referrals as this also brings risks of vulnerable children being missed in the larger numbers.  
 We are taking additional steps to ensure that vulnerable children remain safe as far as is possible:
  - Managers within our service are exploring how we can continue to encourage referrals for children who need a service both in the current lock-down situation and beyond;
  - The safeguarding board has also published information reminding partners and the public about what to do if they are worried about a child;
  - We remain in contact with all the vulnerable children we know about, and continue to offer a range of support and advice. We have also established excellent links with the district community hubs, and provide advice to the hubs about any children they come across about whom they have additional concerns;
  - Finally schools are doing all they can to maintain contact with vulnerable families including those who have chosen not to send their children to school.
 So while there is likely to be a spike in referrals post lock-down, there are some strengths on which we can build arising from the current situation – the involvement of our communities in particular – that we need to continue to harness as part of a better and more joined up support network for children and families across our two authorities.
- Concerns about potential shortage of placements for children and young people with complex needs

Some children with complex disabilities living at home with their families have relied on extensive support packages including short breaks, direct care packages and similar. Small numbers of these are now in a position where it is unclear whether their families will be able to continue to provide care because key elements of their support packages have unravelled as a consequence of the Covid-19 situation.

Similarly, some usually older young people with elements of challenging behaviour in placements that were managing prior to the Covid-19 lock down are now under greater pressure. It is possible that a small number of these will come to unplanned ends.

We are in the process of developing contingency plans to meet both possibilities. These include bringing some buildings and other facilities into short term use as places where council staff can provide support and care to the young people concerned.

We have begun a dialogue with Ofsted to ensure that should such contingencies be required, we can bring them into use with agreement from the regulator.

#### **WORKFORCE UPDATE**

- Workforce availability steady in both authorities;
- Morale seems to remain generally good;
- We have reminded some parts of the workforce of the need to maintain social distancing rules while in offices.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPACT (increase in costs / reduction in income)**

Unchanged:

- A few placements where additional costs have been incurred have taken place, which are being captured through our access to resources team;
- Longer term the risks are that there is a shortage of Independent Fostering Agency placements as demand returns to usual levels, which may result in greater use of residential placements;
- There is also a risk that any spike in demand resulting from more children being referred after the lockdown period ends may require additional temporary staff in our front door and assessment teams.

#### **RECOVERY ACTIVITY (plans being considered / future steps)**

- The eastern region of association of directors of children's services is asking all local authorities to develop recovery plans to replace the self-assessment process. A think piece has been developed and shared with key Members.

#### **COMMUNICATIONS**

- Service Director blog for all staff in children's services;
- Press briefing on how we are supporting care leavers, with support in turn from some local voluntary sector organisations.
- Regular communications only as part of business as usual.