

COVID-19 EMERGENCY PLANNING HIGHLIGHT REPORT

SERVICE AREAS:	Children and Safeguarding
REPORT AUTHOR:	Lou Williams
REPORTING PERIOD:	Week ending 17 th July 2020

NEW GUIDANCE AND IMPACT

- Government has confirmed that it does not intend to extend the majority of the flexibilities previously allowed at the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic, noting that most authorities had not chosen to make use of the majority, Peterborough and Cambridgeshire included. These flexibilities included allowing local authorities to postpone statutory reviews for children in care, relax rules around the placement of children with relatives and medical reports for prospective adopters;
- While we have not used any of these flexibilities, we have used the relaxation to visiting to children and young people in care, which this guidance confirmed could be undertaken virtually. This flexibility will continue for the time being, and it is likely that it may remain in place longer term. We have found that for stable long term placements, this has proved to be an effective way of engaging young people – and often more so than during face-to-face visits.

NEW CHALLENGES AND ACTIVITY

- More of our front line staff will begin returning to buildings over the coming two weeks;
- This return has been carefully planned and will ensure that our staff can maintain social distancing;
- We are also working hard to re-start face to face support activities within our early help services as and when we are able to open facilities and support staff, families and children to access services safely.

RECOVERY ACTIVITY

- A recovery/reset plan for children's services is being developed and will be available at the end of July 2020;
- There is a developing body of evidence as to the likely longer term impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable families and excluded young people in particular;
- This research will inform the recovery plan that is being developed as above.

DECISIONS MADE SINCE LAST REPORTING PERIOD

None

NEW FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS SINCE LAST REPORTING PERIOD

Unchanged:

- A few placements where additional costs have been incurred have taken place, which are being captured through our access to resources team
- Increasingly noticeable that the children in the community that are more likely to be coming into care earlier than anticipated are those with complex needs, and packages to retain them at home are very costly, again captured through the access to resources team
- Some concerns about small but concerning numbers of young people involved in YOS services and possible criminal exploitation may require high cost placements
- 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, assessment teams as well as in early help services

WORKFORCE CHANGES

- Workforce availability steady in both authorities and recruitment has continued successfully; a new ASYE recruitment assessment centre will be held at the end of the month
- Morale remains very good, although staff are increasingly asking to return to offices at least once a week
- Staff continue to go above and beyond to maintain contact with families and children

COMMUNICATIONS

- Regular communication as part of normal business.
- Communication specific to CCC Fostering staff about successful visit from Essex Partners in Practice.