

Name of meeting: Children's Scrutiny Panel
Date: 2nd July 2020
Title of report: Impact of Lockdown and What has Been Done to Keep Vulnerable Children Safe.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report is to ensure that board members have a Service Update with regards to the provision of services to vulnerable Children, Young People, their families and their carers During COVID 19. It also provides a wider overview of the actions and steps taken to ensure that children in Kirklees are safe and contact is maintained during the current emergency.

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	NA
Key Decision - Is it in the Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports?)	NA
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	NA
Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name	
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?	NA
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning?	NA
Cabinet member portfolio	Cllr V Kendrick Children's Portfolio

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: No

Public or private: Public

(Have you considered GDPR?)

Yes GDPR has been considered. The information in this report does not identify any individuals.

1. Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide the Scrutiny with an update on the provision of safeguarding duties and responsibilities by Children's Services and updated Government guidance on Covid-19. It also provides a wider overview of the actions and steps taken to ensure that children in Kirklees are safe and contact is maintained during the current emergency.

Alignment to Government Principles

The new guidance outlines that "local authorities and local safeguarding partners will want to continue to meet their statutory duties as far as they can, but there will be times in the current circumstances when this is not possible."

In recognising that this is a challenging and complex situation decisions should be made in the spirit of the following principles:

- child-centred - promoting children's best interests
- risk-based - prioritising support and resources for children at greatest risk
- family focussed - harnessing the strengths in families and their communities
- evidence informed - ensuring decisions are proportionate and justified
- collaborative - working in partnership with parents and other professionals
- transparent - providing clarity and maintaining professional curiosity about a child's wellbeing

The guidance issued on 3rd April had already been largely implemented in Kirklees. Previous Safeguarding reports to Kirklees Executive Team from the Service Director Child Protection and Family Support strongly reinforced our approach, retaining an emphasis on the child's best interests and family focused approach whilst outlining the steps being taken to safeguard children and promote their welfare in a rapidly changing scenario.

All services have continued to refocus their efforts and staff have adapted to a dynamic, evolving situation. There is a clear understanding for the need to record and capture decisions made in relation to children and young people at this unprecedented time.

Supporting the Workforce

A range of measures are being taken to support the workforce across a range of services including managerial support, check-ins, prioritisation clarity and advice on dealing with Covid-19 presenting clients. Additional evidence has been provided to Covid-19 Corporate co-ordination team in relation staff rotas and establishment of staffed rotas. The rota is over a three-week period and covers four bases.

Social Workers who are working from home are updating records, care plans and assessments. They continue to contact children, parents, carers and professionals through use of technology such as skype, 'WhatsApp' trying innovative ways to maintain good relationships with their children and families and continue direct communication with children.

Team Managers, Service Managers and Heads of Service are maintaining visible leadership on each worksite, working on a rota basis to ensure Social Workers and Managers have direct access whilst in work to discuss cases where concerns may be escalating to ensure safe, swift and accountable decision making takes place in a timely manner.

Children's Social Care Service Areas

Front Door:

At the onset of the lock down The Front Door Duty and Advice and the Emergency Duty Service were working within their normal operating procedures albeit social workers were working from home. All the telephone systems are set to enable Social Workers to pick up calls and manage as appropriate.

Although initially having Social Workers and Early Support practitioners in the Front Door working from home worked well this has not continued to be the case. The Head of Service and Service Manager reviewed cases alongside Team Managers, and it was evident that the quality of work had declined. This is reflective of the nature of support that is not available at a distance from Team Manager in monitoring the quality of conversations and practice. Given the potential of a significant impact on the Front Door a decision was taken to introduce Social Workers and Early Support practitioners back into the workplace on a rota basis. This has enabled Team Managers to mentor and coach the team more effectively which should ensure consistency and quality of contacts and recommendations. In addition, timeliness of completion significantly dipped when social workers were working from home however further scrutiny and support from team managers has ensured timeliness of contacts is improving.

Having agreed to strengthen the early support offer from the front door this is still embedding. The Early Support Service are currently recruiting two new workers into the Front Door which will enable the 'one Front Door' model to function effectively ensuring contacts are responded to at an appropriate level.

The Team Managers continue to work closely with the police to ensure incidents of domestic abuse continue to be assessed and managed appropriately. In addition, we continue to make school notifications to inform schools and early years of incidents of domestic abuse (Operation Encompass) where children were present so they can provide support where necessary.

Assessment and Intervention Teams:

Social Workers continue to respond to immediate child protection investigations. Children and their families are seen, risk is identified, and plans put in place to ensure the child is safeguarded. Where required, legal proceedings are continuing. Key meetings at senior level continue to be held with multi-agency partners including Legal Gateway Panel, Permanency Panel and Children Access to Services Panel. This ensures timely decision making and care planning continues.

Ratification and endorsement of Education, Health and Social Care Plans are also continuing to ensure that packages of support for some of our most vulnerable children can be progressed.

Social Workers continue to undertake Statutory visits to children who are identified as 'at risk' (Children on a Child Protection Plan) or those who are 'in need' (Children in Need) and Children who are in the care of the Local Authority. Each Team Manager, overseen by the Service Manager for the area, have RAG rated and risk assessed each case to ensure those at most risk or vulnerability are given priority. Care Planning meetings are continuing regarding children where risk is increasing.

Individual Risk Assessments on all vulnerable children in relation to them being in education have been undertaken in the past month. There continue to be challenges to this in terms of

the balance between vulnerability and parental choice where we do not have a Legal Order. However as seen later in this document the attendance at school has improved and we continue to encourage parents and carers to support children and young people to attend school. The risk assessments on all children of school age have been completed the only one's outstanding relate to children and young people who are new to the Service and are prioritised for completion.

Clear guidance has been communicated to partner agencies about Child Protection conferences and being organised and held virtually, and families are actively participating virtually, via telephone or video conferencing

Risk and Vulnerability:

Within their capacity these workers have maintained their Exploitation cases however the contact has reduced, and the method of contact adjusted where appropriate. The remainder of the Risk and Vulnerabilities Team have pooled resources with the Youth Intervention Team to deliver management and intervention for young people identified as at risk of exploitation / Gang affiliation.

Youth Offending Service:

Team Managers have conducted a review of all open cases to YOT including Out of Court Disposals. A RAG rating has been applied to each young person. Risk Assessments have been reviewed to ensure they are current and provide a very live perspective of the Young Persons position.

All Intensive Surveillance and Supervision (ISS) cases have continued as per the programme with eye's on visits in accordance with Court / panel direction.

For those young people not known to Children's Social Work a Risk Assessment have been undertaken in respect of their attendance at school. There is a clear evidence based that state young people in education are more vulnerable to criminality and exploitation hence wherever possible we need to encourage and support this vulnerable group to attend school.

Youth Engagement Service:

This merger of the Risk and Vulnerabilities and Youth intervention Teams (as mentioned above) created to manage the current situation reflects the aims of the Youth Practice Model and the development of the Youth Engagement Service. This has created an opportunity to assess the joint working and effectively test the principles of our ambition.

Progress on the full development has continued during the Covid19 situation. An operational group (Risk and Vulnerability, Youth Intervention Team, Youth Offending Team, Early Support and Detached Youth Work) are developing process and procedure to ensure all concerns are captured and plans effectively identified and discharged. Reporting pathways and delivery processes were presented to service directors in May 2020. Business cases currently being prepared to formalise the request.

MST and STARS

The original Multisystemic Therapy (MST) team has continued to work with all existing families throughout lockdown, albeit since 16th March much of this work has been conducted remotely. MST usually follows a predominantly home-based treatment model. However, with some adaptations, including the use of endorsed multimedia applications, this has resulted in most cases observing comparable and, in some cases, improved engagement and

outcomes. Face-to-face clinical sessions have continued throughout the period where an assessment of need has supported this, for example risk (including exploitation and violence), engagement or communication barriers. These have incorporated individual family's preferences and circumstances and has followed wider Children's social work guidance on safety and PPE.

The new MST-E team (Enhanced - for children at risk of exploitation) launched on 6th April, 2 weeks into lockdown. All new staff including 4 Therapists, 2 Service Managers and a Business Support officer were inducted remotely. In the initial 5 weeks following lockdown due to induction, redeployment, and leave pressures, caseloads were held at 80% to ensure capacity to meet existing families' needs. However, after a period of intensive training, service capacity incrementally increased as planned through May. Capacity will further increase throughout June to meet the ongoing steady flow of eligible referrals. Since April, referrals into MST have been processed solely via the early support multiagency panel (ESMAP) to ensure families have timely access to other suitable services in the absence of immediate MST availability.

Alongside colleagues from the Youth Engagement Service and Early Support, MST has led on the development and funding bid to establish a new targeted service. The new "School Transitions and Reach Service" (STARS) aims to provide a whole family-based approach to support young people at risk of future involvement in violence and exploitation, due to disrupted school transitions. The STARS model, which will immediately focus on those particularly impacted by the restriction's resultant from COVID19 transitioning from year 6 to 7, is largely based on key principles of MST.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding processes have been adapted to the new environment to ensure that Child Protection Conferences and Children Looked After reviews take place in timescale and with partners, children (where appropriate) and their families participating.

Kirklees Childrens Safeguarding Partnership

The Partnership continues to meet and has assurance meetings chaired by the Independent Chair on a two-weekly basis. The meetings are attended by the three key Partners, Social Care, Health and West Yorkshire Police, enabling the Chair check and balance in relation to all safeguarding matters and that Partners are working together to ensure children and young people are safeguarded.

The KSCP has created a Covid19 webpage which is regularly updated and put training briefings and Practice Guidance presentations and briefings online. E learning opportunities continue.

Ofsted

We continue to liaise with Ofsted over a range of issues, seeking support particularly in the area of registering new Children's homes for a temporary period in response to sufficiency pressures. Work is being undertaken in relation to reviewing and strengthening our Sufficiency Strategy considering the Covid-19 challenges.

NSPCC

We have now received a number of referrals via this route and we plan to undertake an audit of the quality of those received and the outcomes for the child or young person.

Development and impact issues

We continue to be focused on the effectiveness of the actions we have taken and tracking of changes in demand and workloads.

We continue monitor performance to ensure that compliance around key indicators is maintained. This is necessary to identify and respond to any significant variation in trends in the key data, e.g., rise in DA referrals. This and other data do need to be compared to a “normal” period including holiday periods to determine if we are seeing an under reporting of referrals.

There is both innovation and resilience in how services are being delivered. Technology has enabled many activities to be carried out on a virtual basis and this has been developed appropriately. The principles of good Social Work, however, remain in place and there remains a focus on ensuring that the voice of the child is heard and that children remain safe. Where possible services ensure that a child is seen, and contact is maintained and reviewed.

2. Information required to take a decision

No decision is required, this report is submitted at the request of the Board to monitor the number of children in care. This report is also shared with the Children’s Scrutiny Panel on a monthly basis.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 Working with People

Not applicable

3.2 Working with Partners

Not applicable

3.3 Place Based Working

Not applicable

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

Not applicable

3.5 Improving Outcomes for Children

This information is provided at the request of Corporate Parenting Board to monitor the number of children in care their age and location of placements.

3.6 Reducing demand of services

Not applicable

3.7 Other (eg Legal/Financial or Human Resources)

Not applicable

4. Consultees and their opinions

Not applicable

5. Next steps

A similar report will be presented to future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board.

6. Officer recommendations and reasons

That the report be noted.

7. **Cabinet portfolio holder's recommendations**
Not applicable
8. **Contact officer**
Julie Bragg, Head of Corporate Parenting
9. **Background Papers and History of Decisions**
Previous reports to the Children's Scrutiny on number and age of children in care.
10. **Service Director responsible**
Elaine McShane, Service Director (Child Protection and Family Support)

Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources Improvement Partnerships)