

Name of meeting: Corporate Parenting Board
Date: 1st July 2020
Title of report: Children in Care Services Performance Highlights

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?	No
Key Decision - Is it in the Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports?)	No
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	Not applicable – for information
Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance IT and Transactional Services? Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning Support?	Mel Meggs Not applicable Not applicable
Cabinet member portfolio	Cllr V Kendrick (Children)

Electoral wards affected: None

Ward councillors consulted: None

Public or private: Public

Have you considered GDPR? Yes GDPR considered no service users identified.

Summary

Supporting the Workforce

A range of measures has been undertaken 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 number of staff in each service base has been reduced to ensure we have more than adequate space for Social Distancing (2 meters apart). Initially there were a number of staff who were self-isolating however since Easter there has been an increase in staff returning from self-isolation and being available to work. Staff and teams continued to be deployed to the areas of greatest need.

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.

As time is progressing Social Workers are finding working from home increasingly difficult. They have raised issues in respect of feeling isolated and concern regarding not providing consistency for the children and families they work with. We are taking their concerns very seriously and are currently reviewing how we can increase Social Workers within work settings. This will be based on the Governments Guidance on the next phase whilst also ensuring safe distancing and infection control measures.

Children's Social Care Service Areas

Front Door:

Initially The Front Door 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.

During the lockdown process 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 has been taken to introduce Social Workers and Early Support practitioners back into the workplace on a rota basis. This eventually will lead to all those practitioners who are able to be working from Civic 1.

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 of incidents of domestic

abuse (Operation Encompass) where children were present, so they can provide support where necessary.

The demand to the front door initially dipped following Covid19 lockdown however contacts to the front door are increasing. We are receiving more contacts from members of the public / family members and an increase in police referrals not all relating to domestic abuse. Contacts from both education and health are significantly reduced and are minimal.

Assessment and Intervention Teams:

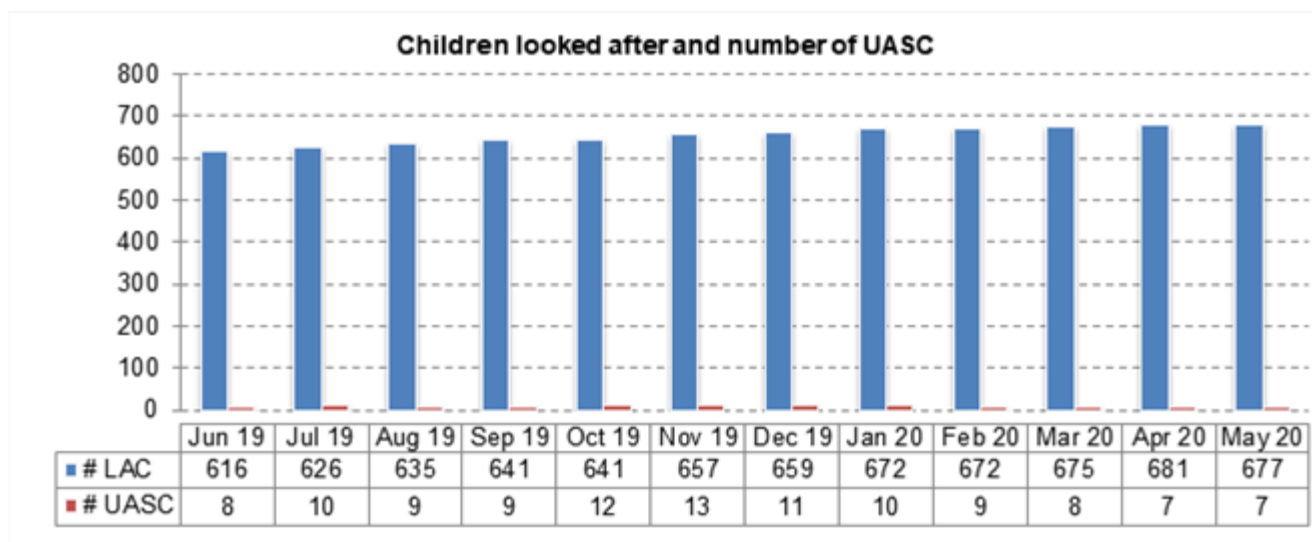
Social Workers continue to respond to immediate child protection investigations. Children and their families are seen, risk is identified, and plans put in place to ensure the child is safeguarded. Where required, legal proceedings are continuing. Key meetings at senior level continue to be held with 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.

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.

Children Looked After:



The numbers of children in care at the start of lockdown was 675 there was a slight increase by the end of May 2020 to 677. On the 12th June 2020 the numbers of children in care were 687 this increase is due to two sibling groups.

Social Workers have continued to undertake statutory visits to children who are in the care of the Local Authority. As within the Assessment and Intervention part of the Service each Team Manager, overseen by the Service Manager for the area, have RAG rated and risk assessed to ensure those at most risk or vulnerability are given priority. This has been regularly reviewed during the lockdown period and amended to ensure that children and young people continue to receive a service to meet their changing needs when appropriate.

As with children and young people within Assessment and Intervention Risk Assessments have taken place in relation to all Children Looked After and their attendance at school. The risk balances the view of the School, carers, Social Worker and the voice of the young person. The assessment is fluid and decisions continued to be reviewed based on what is in the best interest of the child or young person.

Keeping in Touch Co-ordinator - Children in Care

At the start of the lockdown period the Children's Rights Team (CRT) contacted every Kirklees Looked After Child (age 7+) and Care Leaver by letter, to ensure they knew how to contact the service if they wanted advocacy / support. The Keeping in Touch Coordinator is following these letters up with all children and young people who do not currently have an Advocate, to enquire after their health and wellbeing, directly with the child/young person and /or their carer. Independent Visitor's remain in contact with children and young people via several social media platforms, to maintain relationships and provide independent emotional and practical support to young people.

The team has also set up a 'Challenge' competition in response to the Covid-19, as a tool to keep in touch with children and young people looked after. The Children's Rights web page is updated each Monday morning with the new challenge. The links

to the website are posted on the team's Facebook and Twitter page and an email is sent with the links to the Fostering Team and Kirklees Fostering Network who share the challenge with their contacts. There are 4 winners each week receiving a £10 high street voucher. All entries receive a certificate. One positive from the challenge competition is that the CRT Team have had a number of children enter that the team had no previous involvement with.

LAC Reviews- Children in Care.

As a response to Covid 19 all Review meetings for Children Looked After have been held virtually. A key priority for this change in service delivery has been to ensure that children's views and voices were heard. Independent Reviewing Officers have addressed this change by working in partnership with the Children's Rights Team and the service has utilised a variety of tools to communicate with children to gain their views. In particular, older children have presented as more able and willing to be involved in their Review meetings when provided with the opportunity to join virtually. The option for young people to participate in their Review meetings virtually or phone, is a Service development that will be retained to support and enable their participation in the Review Process.

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.

YOT:

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 Childrens 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. The integration of YOT within the Youth Engagement Service is also being developed and alignment of management structure is being explored.

Children's Residential homes and short break settings

Covid-19 has been particularly challenging for residential homes in relation to the day to day operations. Our front line staff have endeavoured to ensure of children's homes have continued to operate as normally as possible whilst managing COVID related risks. In relation to staffing we have experienced some challenges including some staff who are shielding and unable to complete their duties from home and increased sickness levels due to staff anxiety in relation to some challenging behaviours from some children that increase the risk of COVID transmission. Public Health guidance and advice has been sought including infection control; The NHS guidance has been followed and staff have worked tirelessly to try to ensure that young people are following the guidance to reduce risk of Covid-19 in our homes. This has been a challenge particularly in the disability homes as due to personal care needs and children not understanding the guidelines, PPE has been necessary to keep staff and children safe. We have risk assessed all establishments and, in several situations, involved Infection Control to offer their support. We have utilised staff from other services where they are unable to undertake their usual roles and have built a temporary bank of staff to be deployed to fill gaps. Twenty one staff from Kirklees Active Leisure have been working across the service to support vulnerable children; they have had an enhanced DBS check and have undertaken online induction training.

Additional placements have been created within inhouse provision which includes using Orchard View as a mainstream home with a variation to their statement of purpose. The application to register Crescentdale as a children's home has been submitted to Ofsted; there has been a delay with the Manager's DBS, but this should be processed shortly. We will be looking at other options for a further temporary residential home to broaden our sufficiency capacity once Crescentdale is returned to Adult Services on 24th July. We are also in the process of identifying a suitable house to buy to use as a children's home; this will be used for additional capacity and some temporary capacity in the first instance. A floating support manager will start on 3rd July; his role will include supporting Orchard View in the first instance and the set up of new homes as well as considering the set up of a solo provision for the child currently in Healds Road. We are in constant communication with Ofsted around the changes.

We reviewed our short breaks provision in line with social distancing and lockdown measures. We did this with infection control and took the decision to temporarily suspend the services. We risk assessed all the families receiving short breaks provision to identify which families were most at risk of breakdown and therefore in most need of support. The Young Persons Activity Team who normally deliver a service within a building for children with a disability have suspended their group work and are now offering support to families in other ways. KAL staff who can no longer undertake their usual roles have been offering regular support as have care

agencies whose regular work cannot take place. The next step for respite services is to consider how they can reopen safely – a piece of work has commenced to consider this including having children in ‘bubbles’ which is how schools have managed their offer. An advocacy and participation officer is currently undertaking a piece of work with all families who access short breaks to find out more about the experiences of support during Covid-19 and how this can shape our future offer.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

We are maintaining our approach to this group and supporting them in their placements. Visits are being continued and risk assessments updated. Careful consideration is given in relation their age and legal developments. We are adhering to the government’s guidance in relation to the extension in timescales for completing an age assessment.

Care Leavers

Personal Advisors continue to undertake visits to Care Leavers. Each Team Manager/Leader, overseen by the Service Manager for the area, have RAG rated and risk assessed each individual young person to ensure those at most risk or vulnerability are given priority. We continue to deliver food parcels including toiletries to our Care Leavers. We are still making a number of extra financial payments to include young people who are waiting for their first universal credit payment, hardship payments to those who’ve had additional costs due to the extra food/ travel to shop/ keeping in touch costs. This has helped to provide support to young people who have lost their jobs and been laid off or put on furlough but have still not received any monies.

Some young people have chosen to self-isolate and have expressed their wish not to have a direct visit in these situations we have been using social media in order to ensure that we have regular contact.

We are working with Young people in order to complete their housing applications and we are working closely with housing services with regards to being able to provide suitable accommodation when young people will be able to move into their own tenancies.

Foster Carers Support

In the initial stages of lockdown, the importance of the foster carers’ role and their professional judgement has been recognised with specifically tailored advice for the carers and other professionals. Regular communication and joint meetings have been maintained between senior managers and KFN ensuring that issues arising from the COVID-19 situation are addressed in a prompt and timely fashion. Advice has also been provided to Foster Carers individually and through the Kirklees Foster Carers Network in relation to COVID related matter.

Work was also accelerated in relation to a wider foster carer offer to help with stability, retention and recruitment. We have increased in line with inflation both allowances and skills payments. The service is also considering additional one-off payments reflecting additional costs faced by foster carers and their households during this time.

We have accelerated the supply of laptop/devices to Foster Carers to help with better and more appropriate communication. We have also ensured that children in foster placements have access to laptops to support their learning.

A number of additional steps have been taken to support carers and increase capacity:

Emergency foster placements

To address rapid placement breakdown in a Covid-19 period, emergency foster places are required in order to place children quickly in a secure home environment until a long-term solution can be found. In recognition of the skills required, the have introduced an enhanced payment structure for emergency placements at £100 per night, in addition to the regular payments. Emergency foster carers may already be caring for other foster children, but they may have a spare room, or they might be dedicated solely to emergency placements.

Increasing Foster Carer Capacity

To make the most of existing carer capacity, carers who are registered for a higher number of children than they currently can take on extra placements, where it is safe and appropriate to do so. They will automatically receive the additional child allowance and the amount of fostering allowance for a child of that age. This can be paid as an emergency placement payment, which would pay a higher rate for older children (8 years plus).

The Fostering Service has also taken advantage of some relaxation in Fostering Regulations to help speed up recruitment by recreating carers through the Connected Person regulations ensuring all the relevant checks and approvals remain in place.

Council and school staff as Foster Carers

The engagement of Council and school staff as emergency foster carers has been explored. These employees in appropriate Council and School roles will already be DBS checked and are willing to be fast tracked into the service. These has seen a number of additional Foster Carers and identified and recruited.

There are other services developments which will support foster carers such as the development of an Out of Hours service which will help with potential placement breakdown. We have also ensured additional, more frequent contact to foster carers with support from Supervising Social Workers, in the form of additional video /telephone calls.

Managing the needs of children with complex needs during the restrictions can be more challenging and the fostering team and the wider support network have reviewed and broaden all the support they can provide to carers, during this period.

Adoption Services

We are working with the Regional Adoption agency in line with government advice to maintain services as much as practical in the current situation. There had been potential issues with partners in relation to medicals for prospective adopters and

this has now been addressed. The adoption service are working with transition plans that are in line with the government guidelines in relation to contact.

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.

1. Information required to take a decision

Not applicable

2. 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 Improving Outcomes for Children

Oversight and monitoring of children in care performance to continue at future Corporate Parenting Board to monitor progress, as requested by the Chair.

3.5 Reducing demand of services

Not applicable

3.6 Other (eg Legal/Financial or Human Resources)

Not applicable

4. Consultees and their opinions

Not applicable

5. **Next steps**

Managers to lead the focus on areas of performance with staff, in areas where outcome data is not what we expect it to be.

6. **Officer recommendations and reasons**

That the report and key highlights on performance within Children in Care Services be noted.

7. **Cabinet portfolio holder's recommendations**

Not applicable

8. **Contact officer**

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9. **Background Papers and History of Decisions**

Service updates have been used for the narrative for this report

10. **Service Director responsible**

Elaine McShane, Service Director (Family Support and Child Protection)

Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources Improvement Partnerships)