

SCRUTINY ADVISORY BOARD – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Meeting date: November 2020

From: Executive Director People

CHILDREN'S Covid RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN CUMBRIA – UPDATE ON DEMAND AND RECOVERY

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide the Board with an update on impact of Covid on the children's system, its plans for recovery and a look ahead to priorities for children and families.
- 1.2 The report will be supported by a presentation at the meeting.

2 Issues for Scrutiny

- 2.1 To note the report.
- 2.2 To seek assurances around any actions proposed in the report.
- 2.3 To make recommendations to the Executive Director People and the Assistant Directors.
- 2.4 To consider the whether report raises wider issues for other Scrutiny Boards.

3 Background

- 3.1 This report provides an outline of the Covid Response and Recovery Priorities across the Children's System, which covers:
 - Early Years and Schools
 - SEND
 - Social Care and Safeguarding
 - Think Family and Early Help
 - Children's Commissioning

4 Schools

- 4.1 Covid has posed unprecedented challenges for schools. Members of Scrutiny have received regular briefings on this. The meeting will receive a

presentation alongside this report – and will include a contemporary update on the situation across schools and the education system.

5 Early Years

- 5.1 Early years PVI sector (group based and childminders) has showed incredible resilience and support to families throughout the pandemic. We are not aware of any early years settings closing as of yet as a direct result of Covid, however the future of the sector is potentially fragile as a result of a combination of reduced demand from families for fee paying places, and the end of the flexible furlough scheme in March 2021.
- 5.2 There are additional demands practically and financially for early years settings in order to keep children in smaller groups and to implement additional cleaning. The sector is also affected by bubble closures. We are awaiting final confirmation from the DfE regarding childcare places funding for Spring 2021 onwards.
- 5.3 The impact on young children's development, health and learning from missing months of childcare is not known – some children may have thrived due to extended time with caregivers, others may have missed vital opportunities in terms of their nutrition, learning and socialisation. This is likely to result in a widening disadvantage gap.
- 5.4 Opportunities for early identification of additional needs may have been lost due to children not starting or attending their early years setting this year, and there is also likely to be a back log of health led assessments. Some young children with SEND are finding the transition to school challenging and there is an increase in requests for support from Early Years Area SENCOS.

6 SEND

- 6.1 The Covid pandemic has presented an exceptional challenge on our services including the schools and settings our children and young people attend.
- 6.2 We are pleased to inform that we have maintained continuity of support and provision for our SEND children and young people, and despite this disruption and adaptation to new ways of working we have maintained business as usual in the midst of a service redesign that has now ended and implementation of this is underway. The redesign will improve how services work to support the children and young people with SEND.
- 6.3 There are additional demands practically evident in the increase of SEN children and young people who are experiencing high anxiety due to the impact of the Covid pandemic. Work is ongoing with health colleagues to address this through support for schools and settings in managing and meeting needs.

- 6.4 Work continues in relation to the Written Statement of Action through the six identified working groups with the focus remaining on improving SEND provision across the local area
- 6.5 Requests for statutory assessments of SEN have increased and any agreed assessments are taking place within the required statutory timescales. Ongoing support and advice is in place from relevant professionals involved within individuals and schools and settings report the effectiveness of this work on their ability to continue meeting the needs of the SEND children and young people.
- 6.6 Teams across our services are working closely with schools and settings to support when complexities arise relating to individuals. In particular for those children and young people who have complex health needs that need to be managed in a specific way, in these cases we are working in partnership with our health colleagues.

7 Social Care and Safeguarding

- 7.1 The Covid pandemic has presented an unprecedented challenge to our service, as well as to the children and families we support. We are proud to be able to say we have maintained continuity of support and provision for our most vulnerable children and young people, and that despite the disruption, wherever possible we have maintained business as usual.
- 7.2 We have maintained and strengthened our key partnerships during this period, with fortnightly Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) business continuity meetings ensuring a joined up partnership response.
- 7.3 During the response phase there was a significant drop in calls to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, which was in line with the national trend. Whilst figures have been increasing the figure for October 2020 was 19% lower than the 2019 average.
- 7.4 In terms of social care the overall numbers of open cases have fallen by 7% since the start of the pandemic. The picture differs across the districts with Carlisle seeing a substantial decrease in case numbers, whilst numbers in Barrow have increased by 8%. Other districts have either remained stable or seen a small decline in numbers.
- 7.5 Work is being undertaken with children, young people and families to deal with any of the consequences of Covid.
- 7.6 There continues to be a strong line of sight in terms of practice and performance which has engaged staff, families and carers in development and process. A daily key information email is sent out which set out policy and guidance which have been updated in line with any new government or public health information. There have also been online whole management

meetings across county which have delivered information and training and development time.

7.7 The Social Workers in Schools (SWiS) project is in progress, a manager has been recruited to post and social worker recruitment is underway. 8 schools from across Cumbria who will be part of the project have been identified.

7.8 As well as the excellent examples of innovative and flexible response highlighted, inevitably there have been, and continue to be, areas of concern and challenge as a result of Covid which we are working through as part of our recovery planning. These include:

- Delays for children's permanence, due to court delays and backlog.
- The disruption to family time (supervised contact).
- Delays in progressing the establishment of new residential homes.
- The potential for hidden harm to children, young people and their families during this period, and the medium – long term impact of this.

8 The whole system

System Demand

8.1 A number of key areas of demand have been highlighted across the system:

8.1.1 The impact of Covid on Emotional Health and Wellbeing is being seen across the system. In terms of calculating demand, the latest national survey results from NHS Digital show a significant increase in the incidence of children and young people experiencing poor mental wellbeing to the extent of being diagnosed with a mental health disorder. From 1 in 9 in 2017 to 1 in 6 in 2020. It is assumed that this is due to the impact of Covid on the CYP population.

8.1.2 There has been an increase in contacts into safeguarding hub for emotional wellbeing, 90% did not reach threshold for transfer to district social care, a piece of work is being undertaken to review these children and identify their support requirements.

8.1.3 CAMHS surge calculations predict a 70% surge is a reasonable worst-case scenario with the worst effect falling over this winter. Calculations have worked on a basis of 8% of CYP affected by Covid actually being eligible for CAMHS services, meaning that 92% will need to access support elsewhere.

8.1.4 75% of police vulnerable adult referrals relate to mental health referrals (Jan-Oct 2020), a number of these are adults with children in their household.

- 8.1.5 We have seen an increase in Domestic Abuse – 7.8% increase in incidents compared to same period in 2019, with a Child present or witness in approximately 30% of incidents.
- 8.1.6 In terms of Child Exploitation, the Police have reported that there are a number of active County Lines. There has also been an increase in Child Exploitation reports in north and west Cumbria, the south has seen a slight decrease.
- 8.1.7 The Children's Trust Board (CTB) have discussed the impact of Covid on poverty. Many people losing their job or seeing a long-term reduction in income is one of the most significant community concerns. In September 2020 there were 2,800 more households with children claiming Universal Credit than in February 2020. The end of the Furlough Scheme could see the number of children in poverty double from 14% to around 30%.
- 8.2 As can be seen it is not a consistent picture across all areas of demand as some have seen a decrease and some have seen an increase. The CTB is working with the Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) and Safer Cumbria to ensure that the demands are understood and acted upon.

The Children's Trust Board, Early Help and Think Family

- 8.3 A reinvigorated Children's Trust Board (CTB) meets monthly to lead the wider children's agenda, supporting a joined up response to the challenges posed by Covid and more widely.
- 8.4 The recent focus of the CTB has been understanding system demand and the impact of Covid; Early Help and engagement through schools; development of Children & Families Locality Groups and setting of locality priorities. The group have had oversight of a number of key issues:

- hidden harm
- newly vulnerable
- team around school
- locality priorities

And are undertaking further exploration of:

- Specific impacts of Covid on BAME, LGBTQ and other groups
- Poverty (including digital access)
- Emotional Health & Wellbeing systems in recovery

9 Commissioned Services

- 9.1 The main objective for the Strategic Commissioning team during the early phase of the pandemic was to establish systems to quickly identify and manage any emerging issues that would impact commissioned providers, children, young people and their families. Providers completed and returned risk assessments, recovery plans and regular RAG reports. A project team comprising operational and strategic commissioning staff met daily to manage this process. A weekly RAG report was produced for the Executive Director of People.
- 9.2 Strategic Commissioning developed a dedicated 'Coronavirus advice and information webpage', as a point of reference for providers on latest information for example on PPE, outbreak control and how to access the 24-hour emergency response helpline. The webpage also supported families, providing information and guidance on personal budgets and direct payments, advice on accessing PPE for personal assistants and information on testing, as well as FAQs and signposting.
- 9.3 The project team continues to meet three times weekly during the recovery phase to manage and provide a co-ordinated response to localised issues.
- 9.4 Strategic Commissioning attends the daily School Infection Control Team meeting and works with Public Health and providers to manage outbreaks within school settings.
- 9.5 The sourcing of placements for Children and Young People entering Care remains a challenge however regular engagement and monitoring of providers ensures we are aware of and able to plan for any potential disruptions to service delivery.
- 9.6 At a strategic level, the Commissioning team continues to monitor how the crisis has impacted providers, children, young people and families, to identify evolving longer-term priorities.
- 9.7 The systems established to identify and manage Covid related issues have been embedded and are working effectively.
- 9.8 This has allowed Strategic Commissioning to move to the recovery phase and manage its Covid response as 'business as usual'. However, this has resulted in significant change and increased workload.
- 9.9 Two full time, permanent appointments have been made (Commissioning Manager and Commissioning Officer). This has allowed the team to redeploy resource to support the Council's priority areas in relation to Early Help and the SEND Written Statement of Action.

10 Recovery

- 10.1 The Strategic Recovery Coordination Group (SRCG) takes responsibility for coordinating the critical aspects of the Recovery Strategy and has agreed the following purposes:

- 10.1.1 To facilitate and enable recovery of Cumbria from the Covid pandemic, focusing on the impacts at community and countywide level, and the opportunities to reimagine and rebuild a better future for the county, its places, and communities.
 - 10.1.2 To promote collaboration across and through partnerships at countywide and locality level and support the development and delivery of recovery strategies and plans.
 - 10.1.3 To facilitate an approach to recovery in Cumbria that includes community voices, builds community resilience and so supports communities to thrive.
- 10.2 The SRCG is developing a Recovery Strategy and the approach to recovery for Cumbria is built around existing partnership and programme structures rather than establishing a new set of subgroups.
 - 10.3 The draft vision for the strategy is “Building a better, stronger and more resilient Cumbria for our residents, our communities and our businesses” and it developed around the Cumbria Public Health Strategy.
 - 10.4 For children this will mean that the plans for recovery will be driven by the Children’s Trust Board and will be focussed around narrowing the widening gaps for children across the whole range of impacts including: poverty, emotional wellbeing and mental health, skills and education, impact of parental issues, access to digital, safeguarding etc.
 - 10.5 Opportunities to comment on the Recovery Strategy priorities and measures of progress will begin early in 2021.

11 Conclusions and summary

- 11.1 This report presents an overall view of the current demand across our services for children and families and our plans looking ahead as we move into recovery from Covid.
- 11.2 The key messages for the Board to consider are:
 - Covid has been one of the most challenging times for children, families and services we can remember.
 - We may not yet be seeing the full impact of the pandemic on our services and work continues to assess demand and the wider secondary impacts for our children and their families.
 - A strategy for recovery is in development through the SRCG and recovery work for children and families will be led by the Children’s Trust Board in partnership with other strategic partnership boards such as Safer Cumbria, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership.

John Readman, Executive Director – People

November 2020

Please ensure that every part of this section where there is an asterisk* is completed in accordance with the instructions before sending the report to Member Services, following which please delete this sentence.

Appendices

No appendices

Previous Relevant Council or Executive Decisions [including Local Committees]

No background.

Background Papers

No background papers.

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