

BRIEFING	TO:	Improving Lives Select Commission
	DATE:	4 June 2020
	LEAD OFFICER:	Ailsa Barr Assistant director children's social care
	TITLE:	Children's social care service in the light of Covid-19 pandemic

1. Background

1.1	<p>The purpose of this briefing is to provide an overview and assurance of the current situation in respect of delivering children's social care services in the context of the current national crisis. The paper sets out the work undertaken to date and provides an overview and reassurance of how essential work to support planning in relation to children in need, child protection and looked after children is being progressed</p> <p>In the weeks following the decision regarding the national emergency we have worked hard to ensure that measures were in place to ensure that essential children's safeguarding work would continue. This has included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a RAG rating tool to assist managers and social workers identifying the children they are most worried about to prioritise support and home visits. This is a dynamic process and is regularly reviewed. We have embedded the RAG rating into liquid logic so as the level of concern is visible to all with access to Liquid Logic case management system to support service continuity. • Developed a pre-visit risk assessment tool to guide social workers in how to establish with families prior to a visit whether a visit is safe or not in the light of coronavirus this is also embedded in Liquid Logic and is completed prior to every visit. • Social workers have visited all children RAG rated as red or amber and many children rated as green as long as the household isn't symptomatic, deferred visits can only be approved by a manager and social workers are maintaining phone/video call contact with all families even if they can't visit. • Stepped all meetings into virtual arrangements (using skype, MS teams, telephone conferencing) these include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Strategy meetings ◦ Case conferences ◦ Looked after children reviews ◦ Legal gateway planning and pre-proceedings planning meetings ◦ Adoption and fostering panel • Moved to a position where all social workers are working from home with 1 duty team based in Riverside on a rota basis, when working from home staff are still physically visiting families in line with the RAG rating and the pre-visit risk assessment tool. • Stopped providing direct supervised family time (contact) for looked after children and their parents/families but instead supported virtual arrangements e.g. phone calls/video calls etc. • Obtained corporate approval for WhatsApp to be available on all social workers' work mobiles to support them in communicating with families more effectively.
------------	---

- WhatsApp has video calling functionality which supports staff maintaining more 'real' contact with children/parents/carers
- Obtained a stock of personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff. Hand sanitiser is available for everyone doing community-based visits and gloves, face masks and aprons are available in the event that the pre-visit risk assessment tool indicates that this is needed.
 - We are working closely with colleagues in education/inclusion services and key multi-agency partners health/police etc to ensure that the usual routes for escalation and referral of new information is being maintained. The assistant director (Ailsa Barr) has been chairing a twice weekly meeting with partners which has been positively working to identify and unblock problems in service delivery.
 - Ailsa also contributes to weekly conference call with Isabelle Trowler (chief social worker for children) and other children's social work practice leaders from across England, this has enabled a sharing of good practice and ensures some national consistency.

2. Key Issues: What's Working Well / What are we worried about?

2.1 What's Working Well?

- Social workers have been supported to continue their work in a safe way ensuring both the safety of the both children/young people and staff. Most visits to children have remained physical visits by social workers – performance in this area for week commencing 11th May is:

	Total Visits	Physical		Virtual	
CIN	438	387	88.36%	51	11.64%
CP	342	318	92.98%	24	7.02%
LAC	147	116	78.91%	31	21.09%
All	927	821	88.57%	106	11.43%

- The timeliness in relation to assessments has remained high at 95% assessments completed in 45 working days.
- Using different technologies has helped to open different ways of engaging children, young people and their families and much of this has been positively received.
- The multi-agency partnership working relationships have been strengthened and there has been a real commitment to work collaboratively to ensure that children and young people are kept safe from harm. An example of this positive multi-agency work is attached which has been developed and distributed across the partnership to remind all partners of the importance of working together and sharing information to safeguard children.



May 2020 Covid
Safeguarding latest.

- The service has maintained a focus on progressing work wherever possible, it has been acknowledged that especially within the pre-proceedings area of work this has been identified as good practice and we have received some positive feedback from legal colleagues as Rotherham's practice in this area is proactive as opposed to stepping down this area of work we have maintained the progression of work to support families on the edge of legal proceedings.

- There have been amendments to some of the legislation underpinning the delivery of some element of children's social care. The changes have allowed some relaxation of some regulations. Because of the early decisions that we have made to RAG rate our work and to move key processes (i.e. panels and review meetings) into virtual delivery we have not so far needed to utilise the relaxations available via the amended legislation. The report presented to the tactical and gold RMBC groups is attached for further information.



RMBC response to
The Adoption and C

- The Department for Education has also published guidance for children's social care services. It is reassuring that many of the recommendations within this guidance was already in place in Rotherham when the guidance was published on 6th May 2020. A link to the guidance is below for further information.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care>

2.2 What are we worried about?

- The number of referrals has reduced since the end of March, this makes us worry that some children or young people may need help but that this is not being identified early enough because less professionals are having physical contact with children and young people meaning that there are less opportunities to gather information in an incremental manner.
- Although most children and young people are having physical contact with their social worker, it is hard for workers to effectively intervene and progress plans when many of the support services have reduce their offer of support or have shifted to a virtual delivery model. This means that although we are confident about the safety and welfare of children and young people, we are less confident that work to positively intervene and progress the plan is being completed. This could mean that some children will require work lead by a social worker for a longer period.
- The combination of the above and a potential surge of referrals as schools re-open and other professionals recommence more direct contact with families could put a lot of pressure on the social work system and this could affect our effectiveness in working with families.
- Our looked after children have mostly not been having physical contact with their birth family, this is hard for many of our looked after children and their families.
- Our social workers have been working at home since the end of March this is not a usual set of arrangements for social work delivery. Our staff are missing the day-to-day contact with colleagues and the informal opportunities to share issues and collectively problem solve.

3. Key Actions and Timelines

3.1

- Ongoing work with the multi-agency partnership to ensure that children's safeguarding remains a top priority for all – weekly multi-agency meetings will continue.
- Social workers and managers to continue to review all casework and ensure that all opportunities to progress plans are considered and where work needs to be extended it will be explicit to all that the delay to progressing plans relates to Covid-19.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social work managers will continue to work closely with the performance service to ensure that plans are in place to respond to any surge in demand • Options to be developed to consider safely progressing contact for looked after children with their families, these options will need to consider all risks and mitigations and take into account individual circumstances – options to be presented to tactical and gold groups during w/c 8th June 2020 • Options to be developed to consider how we can enable our social work staff to safely undertake some of their work from their work bases to allow them to benefit from face-to-face connection with their manager and colleagues – options to be presented to DLT during w/c 8th June 2020
4. Recommendations: What are we going to do about it?	
4.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That members note the information contained within the report and seek further assurance from the assistant director for children's social care at subsequent meetings of the improving lives select commission.