

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Lives Select Commission – 15 December 2020

Report Title

Update report regarding children’s social care service in the light of Covid-19 pandemic

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Suzanne Joyner, Strategic Director, Children and Young People’s Services

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This briefing paper is by way of update following the briefing papers presented to the commission on 4 June and 22 October 2020. The report aims to provide an overview and assurance of the current situation in respect of delivering children’s social care services in in the context of the current national crisis.

Please refer to the previous briefing papers for further background.

Recommendations

That members note the information contained within the report.

List of Appendices Included

N/A

Background Papers

Briefing paper on Children’s social care service in the light of Covid-19 pandemic – 4 June 2020

Briefing paper on Children’s social care service in the light of Covid-19 pandemic – 22 September 2020

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
N/A

Council Approval Required
No

Exempt from the Press and Public
No

Update report regarding children's social care service in the light of Covid-19 pandemic

1. Background

- 1.1 This briefing paper is by way of update following the briefing papers presented to the commission on 4 June and 22 October 2020. The report aims to provide an overview and assurance of the current situation in respect of delivering children's social care services in in the context of the current national crisis.
- 1.2 Please refer to the previous briefing papers for further background.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 Social workers continue to undertake their work with the children allocated to them. Most children are still being seen person. A pre-visit risk assessment process is in place, in the event that there are risks highlighted then a decision is made in conjunction with the team manager as to whether the visit needs to go ahead with the worker using personal protection equipment (PPE) in the form of a mask, apron and gloves, or whether the visit can be safely delayed with virtual contact being provided instead.
- 2.2 The timeliness in relation to visits, assessments and plans has remained good with October's performance figures indicating the following:
 - Child protection visits 90.6% within statutory time frames
 - Visits to looked after children 96.6% within statutory time frames
 - Assessments 96.9% completed within the 45-day timeframe
 - Timeliness of plans:
 - CiN plans – 90.5% within time
 - CP plans – 88.3% within time
 - LAC plans – 93.3% in time
- 2.3 Our staff continue to use different technologies to engage with children, young people and their families, and staff. This offers flexibility and allows for different ways to maintain communication in between physical visits.
- 2.4 We have reviewed our services in the light of the second national lockdown and do not consider that there is a need to step any of the services down as the service has adapted well to some of the new ways of working and the guidance and risk assessments in place means that we can continue to deliver some essential activities which were previously moved to virtual delivery (i.e. family time (contact) for looked after children with their birth family).
- 2.5 Our case holding social workers have continued to have some access to working in an office base (namely Riverside House), however, we did reduce the frequency of the rota in the light of the second national lockdown and this will remain under review.

- 2.6 The use of technology has meant that we have been able to re-start our learning and development offer for staff which is key to their ongoing professional development. We have a full programme of training all of which is being delivered virtually and ranges from small workshop style events through to whole service events where we have had over 200 staff in attendance
- 2.7 Ofsted undertook a Focused Assurance Visit on 20 – 22 October, which was part of the re-start of inspections of children’s service that had been suspended from March – September 2020. The purpose of the visit was to examine the quality and impact of key decision-making across help and protection, children in care and services for care leavers, together with the impact of leadership on service development.
- 2.8 The team of four inspectors had access to a significant level of statistical information about the children that the service is engaged with. The inspectors then spent three days exploring in detail the work of our practitioners, the inspection was managed virtually but nonetheless the inspection team virtually met with early help workers and social workers as well as representatives from the education sector across the borough.
- 2.9 The findings of the focused inspection visit are summarised in a letter which is published on the Ofsted website. The letter is positive in respect of the work undertaken by the service and some of the highlights include:
- 2.10 Rotherham children’s services reacted rapidly and effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic in the early months of 2020.
- 2.11 Strong and effective multi-agency partnerships enabled the early identification of vulnerable children. Senior leaders, managers and staff have effective oversight of children and young people who need to be safeguarded and supported.
- 2.12 Dynamic assessments of COVID-19 risks have allowed children to be seen directly where it is safe to do so. Detailed children’s assessments enable proportionate decisions to be reached, ensuring that families receive an appropriate level of support. The voice of the child is a strength in assessments and influences care planning. However, the quality of written plans is not consistent for all children.
- 2.13 Effective pre-proceedings planning enables children to remain living with brothers and sisters or with extended family wherever possible. Children are supported to maintain contact with their families, utilising digital technology if required. Additional support to meet the emotional needs of children in care is available via the in-house therapeutic service.
- 2.14 Feedback from the Ofsted team has also provided areas for ongoing development, it was positive that these areas closely linked with areas that as a service we were already aware of.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 We will continue to monitor the flow of work and demand for the service to ensure that we are maximising opportunities for early intervention whilst also ensuring that services are engaged with those children/young people that require it. Regular interrogation of data and performance will continue to inform us in terms of demand and flow of work.
- 3.2 We continue to work hard to support the children/young people and families that our social workers are working with. Social workers are working with families to help them to feel confident to access education, which will ensure that families aren't dealing with the additional pressures of children being at home for extended periods of time.
- 3.3 We continue to support our staff, who are working hard in the ongoing difficult work context. We will review our staff access to office-based accommodation when the national guidance regarding working from home wherever possible has been further updated. In the meantime, we are encouraging teams to meet regularly via virtual means and continue with regular communication with staff to ensure that we fully understand the pressures of their current working arrangements.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 N/A

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 N/A

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)

- 6.1 There are no financial implications.

7. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

- 7.1 There are no legal implications.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no HR implications.

9. Risks and Mitigation

- 9.1 The increase in relation to the number of contacts received by the MASH continued throughout September as compared to the same time period in 2019. However, during October numbers of contacts stabilised to a comparable level with figures from 2019. Because of a busier than usual summer and September

the service has been busy but workflow in terms of assessments, and children requiring an ongoing social work service is within manageable limits.

- 9.2 We are concerned about the impact of the ongoing pandemic both for the families that we work with but also for our workforce who continue to work hard to prioritise the needs of those children that they are working with.

10. Accountable Officer(s)

Ailsa Barr, Assistant Director Social Care