



Report of the Cabinet Members for Children’s Services

Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel – 16 September 2020

Impact of Covid 19 Pandemic on service delivery within Child and Family Social Care

Purpose	To provide a briefing requested by the Panel on the Covid 19 Pandemic, including impacts, activities, challenges, and recovery.
Content	This report includes a summary of the <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • modification plan • challenges to delivering core business • actions taken to ensure core business is delivered • Performance within the service and nationally
Councillors are being asked to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the report as part of their scrutiny role of this service area.
Lead Councillor(s)	<p>Cllr Elliott King – Cabinet Member for Children’s Services</p> <p>Cllr Sam Pritchard - Cabinet Member for Children’s Services</p>
Lead Officer(s)	<p>Dave Howes – Director of Social Services</p> <p>Julie Thomas – Head of Child & Family Services</p>
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1. Introduction

1.1. The Covid 19 Pandemic, and subsequent lockdown requirements resulted in Child and Family Services (CFS) implementing a number of emergency measures in line with local corporate and national guidance. This was to ensure the safety of staff, and the community with whom we work, and to enable statutory duties under the SS and Wellbeing Act, 2014 (Wales), and core business to be delivered. That is, the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, including those children whose names are placed on the child protection register, those who are care experienced and care leavers. Children not in these categories, but whose needs required a Care and Support Plan received a reduced service.

1.2. The 'Supporting People to Reconnect with families, Friends and Professionals' guidance jointly produced by Welsh Government (WG) and Care Inspectorate Wales, provides an ethical framework to support on-going service response, planning and decision making in relation to Covid 19. The guidance primarily relates to Care Home settings but has been adapted to guide decision making through initial set up of arrangements, when restrictions ease, and to modify the service as necessary.

2. Service Planning

2.1 An overarching service modification plan is in place, underpinned by agreed principles relating to each traffic light phase of the WG restrictions. They are also found in each individual service specific modification plan and include key areas of

- Staffing
- Buildings
- Planned group work
- Planned direct work
- Unplanned work
- Service specific requirements
- Facilitating Contact (between staff and service users)
- Areas for modification rather than resumption

2.2 The Principal Officer Group has worked alongside the Senior Management Team and the Business Development and Commissioning Unit to co-ordinate, plan and develop the delivery of CFS business continuity response and modification plan for the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3 In order to understand the impact of changes to our 'business as usual', Team Managers were asked to complete a recovery questionnaire outlining which areas of the service had to cease or be modified as a result of the Business Continuity procedures enacted as part of the response to the disruption.

2.4 In addition to the recovery questionnaire, the New Adventures of Working survey was sent out to staff across the Service with the aim of understanding how our workforce feel about the modified working practices, and any benefits or impact

they have seen as a result of the changes and aspects of their well-being during this time.

- 2.5 The ethical framework, guiding principles and key learning have been used to create a high level service modification / recovery plan that reflects the Welsh Government's traffic light system, phased return to normal. This overarching plan considers all of the guiding principles other than those which relate to individual service specific issues for modification or recovery as these can be found in the detailed operational service plans.
- 2.6 The Recovery/Modification Plan is attached – appendix 1. This has now been adapted as lockdown restrictions eased in line with WG and Public Health Wales Guidance and a fully revised plan will be available mid - September.
- 2.7 The first main challenge has been around workforce wellbeing and safety. CFS were well placed to manage this challenge as this has been a strong focus within the Improvement Plan and the service was already working agilely. There have however been concerns regarding social isolation of staff who are managing distressing and highly pressured situations without immediate support from colleagues. The strong team ethos of support, modelling of the values of the SOS Practice Framework within colleague interaction, and the ability to communicate effectively, virtually, has enabled us to maintain a strong workforce. The positive communication strategy developed over time has enabled us to get information out to staff, in the way they have told us works for them, further enhancing wellbeing.
- 2.8 The second challenge was being able to 'see' children regularly, undertake direct work, provide intensive support to those most vulnerable children, young people and families and promote contact between care experienced children and their families, given the restrictions. This challenge was addressed through the effective use of virtual platforms, continuing face to face contact using social distancing and where necessary use of PPE. All contact between care experienced children and their families was initially undertaken virtually but the service quickly moved, and was one of the first Local Authorities to do so in Wales, to promoting safe direct physical contact. All cases within CFS were given a rag status and weekly meetings were set up with partners in Police, Education and Health to monitor progress, ensure children were being seen, the visits/virtual contacts co-ordinated and rag status reviewed. A separate reporting mechanism was established to monitor performance in this area and ensure regular contact was maintained.
- 2.9 A third potential challenge was placement finding, with worries about placement breakdown due to the pressures caused by children not being in school and not being able to interact with friends. To date placement stability has remained high, with effective use of the edge of care team and the respite home. Placement finding remains a challenge but manageable due to the flexibility and skill of Foster Swansea and their Carers, our 'in house' residential home, and positive relationships between commissioning and external providers.

3. Performance and analysis

- 3.1 Appendix 2 – CFS Performance Report July 2020
- 3.2 The headline figures are stable, although there is a high level of CP activity and the front door is busy, but is diverting more cases. There is a possibility of a spike in demand at the front door when schools return, although the Early Help Hubs are embedding and work is being undertaken to support schools to respond to worries proportionately. Statutory visits are at or above target and high numbers of children are being seen as part of assessments. All care experienced and CP cases are allocated to a qualified worker and conference and review activity continues to operate at a high level. Staffing, caseloads and supervision remains strong. Caseloads are stable. It is essential that PL's are freed up to undertake their role and cases are reallocated as a matter of urgency.
- 3.3 Areas requiring consolidation are around assessment activity, the SOS metrics and the quality of Care and Support Plans (CSP). Quality of work in this area will enable us to support children's safety and achieve good outcomes.
- 3.4 There are no young people on remand and low numbers in secure accommodation – all of them placed in Wales. The numbers of care experienced children remains high, however the profile of this population of CYP is positive – see Appendix 3 and Swansea is positioned well nationally – see Appendix 4 – WG analysis and Appendix 5.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The service has demonstrated that by focusing on the right priorities within the Improvement Programme, including the focus on staff Wellbeing, SW practice, performance and partnership it was well placed to manage the challenge of Covid 19. The project team who have supported this work and the communication strategy has enabled us to share important information to keep staff and children safe and listen to the views of staff, children and their families, resulting in learning opportunities going forward. As a result it is unlikely the service will return to a full recovery model but will use the learning to modify the way in which core business is delivered, to develop a more efficient and effective service better able to meet demand. The values underpinning the service of doing with, using a strengths based model, of listening and participation, and valuing diversity will remain.
- 4.2 A number of key themes were identified from the survey responses which have been developed in to guiding principles for the service modification plan.
- 4.3 Opportunities have resulted from the learning of the different ways of working as a result of Covid but there are also challenges and that is why staff wellbeing is being supported by a number of different means. Opportunities to return to work in the office are in place, on a voluntary basis, respecting social distancing requirements. Engagement and workforce development will be prioritised to

support staff to continue to work flexibly and develop the skill base necessary to build a confident workforce able to deliver a quality service.

4.4 Effective use of digital and virtual platforms – which young people and families have told us works for them - will be maximised, but used to enhance not replace face to face relational social work.

4.5 Resources will be prioritised for the most complex and worrying cases, flexing our staff, systems and services to adapt to this and Covid 19 has supported the development of a whole service approach to service delivery, which will be maximised going forward.

4.6 Closer collaboration with partners has been essential to develop a joint response. This needs to be maintained and strengthened.

<https://gov.wales/visits-care-homes-guidance-providers-html>.

Attached Documents

- Appendix 1
- Appendix 2
- Appendix 3