



**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY  
REVIEW BOARD  
14 December 2020**

**ITEM  
09**

Report sponsor: Andy Smith, Strategic Director People Services

Report author: Suanne Lim, Director Early Help & Children's Social Care

## **Monitoring Safeguarding Practice**

### **Purpose**

- 1.1 COVID 19 has presented unprecedented challenges to the delivery of children's safeguarding services both locally and nationally. There has been an imperative that vulnerable children and their families are adequately supported to safeguard their welfare. The overall impact longer term of COVID 19 on vulnerable children and families is as yet unknown.
- 1.2 The report provides an overview of Derby's continuing response to COVID 19 and implications for safeguarding practice. Given that a stable and competent workforce is the pre-requisite for safeguarding children and young people and in driving forward improvements, this report also outlines current pressures and performance within the service.

### **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 To note the content of the report, current pressures and plans in place to address future challenges.

### **Reason(s)**

- 3.1 Maintaining a safe environment where good social work can flourish is dependent upon having sufficient, stable, competent and an experienced workforce and management.

### **Supporting information**

- 4.1 The service had been progressing successfully its plan for recovery and restoration with rotation of social work teams increasing access to COVID secure and risk assessed offices from September. Direct contact with children, young people and their families had been steadily increasing and revised guidance was re-issued to all staff to promote direct visits and contacts where safe to do so following the second set of changes to the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 2020 ('the temporary regulations').

However, from mid-October onwards, the rates of infection began to rise quickly within Derby and Tier 2 status was implemented on 31 October. This was followed quickly by the Government's announcement that a month long second national lockdown would commence on the 5 November last to 2 December 2020.

- 4.2 Contingency plans for delivery of statutory functions by Early Help and Children's Social Care had been formulated, agreed and distributed by 23 October 2020 by its senior leadership team. This detailed how resources and staffing from across all services would be deployed and relocated to preserve and prioritise key services such as children's safeguarding functions, should the need arise. Given the need for specific qualifications, the service does need to draw on its own resources to provide safe and appropriate cover. Therefore, on the basis of priority statutory function, wider services understood when they would need to be flexible and when it would be necessary and required to pause existing work. Given the experience of the initial lockdown and employed practices, moving back to increased virtual visits and updating risk assessments has been less problematic than anticipated. Services have adapted again to the change and there has not been the need to implement whole team replacements to date. However, there has been more staff contracting COVID 19 during latter weeks than was experienced during the first wave. The situation remains high alert and is carefully monitored on a daily basis.

Pro-active and dynamic risk assessments of all children, young people and families were completed during the initial stages of Covid-19. We prioritised any face to face contact for those children who most needed it using a RAG rated system, alongside the LA developed Covid risk assessment tool, to ensure that any necessary visits were completed with both staff and children's/family's safety in mind.

Alternative methods to facilitate contact with children, young people and families have now become standard practices (i.e. SKYPE/Microsoft teams/telephone etc.), and where it was assessed that young people might be struggling, the intensity of contact has been increased.

- 4.3 In respect of quality of practice during this period there are a number of measures in place to provide assurance of safeguarding practice. Firstly, monthly safeguarding assurance meetings have continued throughout Covid-19, enabling senior leaders to be appropriately sighted on practice and that any challenges with staffing are addressed. This also helps to assure senior leaders in relation to any case load or workload pattern changes. There has been weekly monitoring of front-door activity which was introduced in April 2020 including targeted monthly dashboards, to fully understand the impacts of Covid-19 on families and the level of need in the city, enabling senior leaders to ensure we have appropriate capacity to support our children, young people and families. Quality assurance activity was re-focused at the start of the financial year, with targeted Covid-19 impact audits completed in May, June and July 2020 and the standard audit programme resumed from August 2020. Keeping in touch with practitioners has been critical during this period, virtual staff conferences and city managers meetings have been hosted to remain connected to the frontline; supplemented by council-wide colleague and managers conferences taking place monthly (alternating, one per month). Finally, supervision arrangements, in line with our policy, supported by online communication platforms has been maintained.

#### **4.4 Pressures and Performance**

There has been consistently close work with schools and wider partners since the onset of Covid-19, to ensure oversight of our vulnerable children. A strength that has continued to evolve and develop; including virtual strategy meetings and Vulnerable Children's Meetings with good multi agency participation.

There has been targeted support for schools provided by our Learning and Skills department.

There had been an increase in demand compared to the same period in 2019. Average caseloads remain stable and agency workers kept to a minimum.

- 6% rise in contacts since April 2020, compared to same period in 2019 and a 16% rise in referrals.
- 27% increase in domestic abuse referrals.
- 5% rise in early help cases, 2% increase in children with a child protection plan and 9% increase in the number of looked after children.

For children receiving support at the end of October 2020, the service has worked to ensure that they have continued to receive timely support...

- 95% of Initial Child Protection Conferences were held within 15 working days.
- 96% of single assessments completed in statutory timescales.
- 96% of CIN reviews completed in timescales
- 86% of child protection visits completed in line with the plan, with 94% of reviews completed in target timescales.
- 91% of statutory visits were held in timescale for children in care.
- 100% of children in care reviews were completed in timescale with maintained participation rates of over 96%

#### **Public/stakeholder engagement**

- 5.1 There is an ongoing programme of engagement with social work staff and managers to ensure a direct line of sight and communication between senior managers and the front line.

#### **Other options**

- 6.1 There is openness to exploring all options to improve safeguarding practice.

#### **Financial and value for money issues**

- 7.1 None for this report

#### **Legal implications**

- 8.1 Local Authorities have a legal responsibility to provide sufficient social workers to act as key workers to children in care, children subject to child protection plans and to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect and to assess children in need.

### **Climate implications**

- 9.1 None identified.

### **Other significant implications**

- 10.1 None identified

**This report has been approved by the following people:**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Date of sign-off</b>
<b>Legal</b>	Olu Idowu HOS Legal Services	1 December 2020
<b>Finance</b>	Janice Hadfield HOS Finance	1 December 2020
<b>Service Director(s)</b>	Suanne Lim, Service Director Early Help & Children's Social Care	30 November 2020
<b>Report sponsor Other(s)</b>	Andy Smith Strategic Director of People	30 November 2020
<b>Background papers: List of appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 – Extraordinary Times Calls for Extraordinary People	