

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 and additional protective measures put in place to safeguard their welfare. The overall impact of COVID 19 on vulnerable children and families is as yet unknown.
- 1.2 The report provides an overview of Derby's safeguarding services' response to COVID 19 and outlines performance, quality and predicted future demand. 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 the plans for the future service model and recovery.

Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To note the actions being taken during COVID 19 to manage services and challenge progress.

Reason(s)

- 3.1 To provide the Board with an overview of the effectiveness of safeguarding practice in the city.

Supporting information

- 4.1 **Response to COVID 19.** The Children Act 1989 remains in force throughout the pandemic in respect of the provisions relating to local authority duties to safeguard and protect the welfare of children. In preparation for lockdown, all frontline practitioners, managers and business support staff were issued with IT equipment and transferred themselves to a working from home environment. A schedule of priority activity was devised based on risk and our statutory functions. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, safety measures were swiftly introduced to protect staff from the virus and have resulted in staff working from home and becoming 'digital by default'. Much of this required the adoption of digital technology, and staff adapted quickly.

- 4.2 While Government advice was to work at home during the pandemic, there was a need identified early to have fixed office locations for Reception Service and child protection duty staff at Ashtree House, Stanley Road and the Council House. Minimum safe staffing of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and locality duty teams was deployed and rota-ed. All staff were expected to work from home except the MASH and Duty Teams. Staff conducted visits as usual, and all other communications went online. In addition, all our Children's Homes remained open, the Short-break Residential provision remained open and two Children Centres remained open to support the Community Hub and the distribution and delivery of food parcels to the most vulnerable children and their families.
- 4.3 The regulatory flexibilities announced by Department for Education (DfE) regarding the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 ("Amendment Regulations"), temporarily amends 10 sets of regulations relating to Children's Social Care between 24 April 2020 and 25 September 2020. The amendments are there to assist the Children's social care sector to respond during the coronavirus pandemic and provide extra flexibility in some circumstances. A separate report outlining the use of legal flexibilities was agreed by Derby City Council Cabinet on 10 June 2020. Derby has utilised flexibility in relation to fostering and there is a clear record of decision making and sign off by the Strategic Director of People and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. The use of flexibilities is kept under regular review.
- 4.4 **Management Overview.** Initially there was a daily Keep in Touch (KIT) Meeting held with the Director and Heads of Service which reduced to three times weekly and currently weekly. The meetings considered capacity and provided an agile response to new circumstances that arose. From the beginning of lockdown to the end of July 2020 the Director attended the Council wide Tactical Coordination Group and escalated COVID related service needs as necessary which fed into the Strategic Coordination Group for strategic decision making. Heads of Service would hold daily and/ or weekly meetings within respective services depending on need. New COVID arrangements are now in place from August 2020
- 4.5 **Staff.** Staff were briefed and updated on changes to the Public Health guidance, including social isolation, distancing and shielding throughout the COVID 19 period. Staff were expected to work from home where possible.
- 4.6 **Personal protective equipment (PPE)** was initially in short supply but systems were put in place to ensure required equipment was readily available to all frontline workers visiting children and those in direct care positions. Training in its use was provided.
- 4.7 **Early Help.** Direct intervention was paused initially and virtual support was provided after risk assessment of each case. Cases classed as Risk were visited. All cases were signed off by a manager. Team Around the Family meetings continued virtually where possible.
- 4.8 **Children Centres.** Two children's centres remained open, one offering continued Midwifery services and one as a Food Hub. Children's centre staff provided activity packs for families with under 5's.

- 4.9 **Reception Service** (including MASH and DV triage). The service maintained its focus on safeguarding children and delivered a direct response to contacts and referrals where threshold was met. Child Protection and Complex Children in Need were prioritised. All cases were risk assessed and signed off by a manager.
- 4.10 **Locality Areas.** Duty Teams were maintained. All teams reviewed their cases and undertook a risk assessment to decide whether direct or virtual contact was appropriate to need and risk. Child Protection and Complex Children in Need were prioritised. All cases were risk assessed and signed off by a manager. All child protection meetings were held virtually.
- 4.11 **Children in Care and Care Leavers.** There was no need to reduce our contact with children in care. However, statutory contact and visits were conducted virtually (using Skype or phone). All cases were risk assessed and signed off by a manager. Statutory reviews have been held virtually and at the minimum frequency required. Prioritisation was made of the most vulnerable children in care, and those close to placement breakdown. This might include those who are running away, and at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation. The Child Permanency Team continued to undertake assessments for adoption virtually. Adoption Panel met virtually. Some care leavers found social isolation or distancing challenging and this was a very anxious time for them as issues such as rent, buying food and the implications of ceased education provision became more challenging; our UASC Care Leavers were particularly vulnerable in this context. The most vulnerable individuals have been seen face to face. Communication with this vulnerable group was increased on a case by case basis. Risk assessments and the impact of the COVID 19 on mental health in this group have been undertaken. Multi agency work and sign positing has been crucial. Some service users are unable to communicate verbally. The service has worked together with NHS specialists and adult social care, residential staff, police, safeguarding teams, psychologists, housing. Shared Lives carers, family support and many other agencies. Contact has been maintained with multi agencies via SKYPE and TEAMS whilst residential placements had a no visiting policy. Complex cases have been monitored carefully and robust action plans agreed and implemented by the young persons' multi agency network. Visits to residential placements have taken place where that was safe to do so. For example a care leaver who was not communicating verbally due to feeling anxiety was visited in Bournemouth for the maximum period of time allowed by placement of two hours and this visit has been successful with the care leaver feeling less anxious and communicating via text and phone calls. SEND care leavers who live with carers and shared lives carers have had regular contact by telephone, video calls, emails and WhatsApp. This has been well documented on case notes and case supervision. SEND care leavers who live semi independently and independently have had regular contact via video and phone calls. In addition the service have undertaken doorstep visits, emails and multi agency contact where required.

- 4.12 **Children with a Disability.** Some disabled children and young people became very vulnerable during this pandemic. Work continued with families to find ways to offer the support that they need, whilst at the same time being very mindful of parents' understandable concerns about their children's health. Short break services continued and diversified to offer day care respite. This has been an invaluable lifeline for parents who have children with moderate to severe disability.
- 4.13 **Fostering Service.** Assessments continued virtually though enquiries dropped during the first part of lockdown. Fostering Panel continues to meet virtually.
- 4.14 **Children's Homes.** All open homes have continued to deliver 24 hour care and provided stability for the cohort of resident young people at the point of lockdown. Staffing was able to be covered.
- 4.15 **Youth Offending Service.** All staff worked from home. The top vulnerable and risk of harm young people were identified and contact arrangements put in place to manage the risk. All risk assessments were signed off by a manager.
- 4.16 **Quality Assurance.** The scheduled audit programme was suspended and replaced with COVID specific programme of audits. The reduced scheduled programme will resume in August 2020 for the remainder of the year.
- 4.17 **Workforce training.** Virtual and face to face training programmes were delivered across the service to specific teams in children's social care. on a priority basis.
- 4.18 During COVID 19, the Council undertook a survey given all its staff were predominantly working from home. The survey relating to Early Help and Children's Social Care reported
- 80% felt safe in their current working arrangements
 - 72% felt connected and supported by their managers
 - 88% felt they have had the opportunity to voice any concerns
 - 82% understood how to access wellbeing support
 - 52% felt their workload had increased
- 4.19 **Performance.** Throughout COVID 19 there has been a robust grip maintained by senior managers on performance and ensuring intelligence and insight continually informs and drives practice. The monthly Practice and Development Board, Chaired by Strategic Director of People, receives assurance from Heads of Service and the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care on the quality of practice and provides constructive challenge. There is an established annual case audit programme, however in May, June and July there has been specific focus on assurance of practice for children subject to child protection plans, children in care and children in need. Derby participated in developing a regional Interim Quality Assurance Framework which was used in these three audits to ensure consistency of approach across the region. The aim of the quality assurance framework is to evidence children are being protected in line with interim COVID-19 procedures within local authorities and existing statutory expectations. The audit findings provides solid assurance in respect of the quality of practice during COVID 19 to date.

4.20 Child Protection – findings

- 69/72 audits were undertaken representing 17.5% of all Child Protection cases
- 82% had a COVID 19 risk assessment
- 82% evidenced work being undertaken in line with the current plan and risk assessment document
- 89% evidenced appropriate multi agency working
- 88% evidenced voice of child and family on file
- 82% evidenced through direct contact, telephone, video, feedback from partners that child was safe and visible

4.21 Looked After Children – Summary

- 64/64 audits were completed representing 10.3% of Children in Care
- 84% had a COVID 19 risk assessment
- 90% evidenced work being undertaken in line with the current plan and risk assessment document
- 90% evidenced appropriate multi agency working
- 92% evidenced voice of child and family on file
- 90% evidenced through direct contact, telephone, video, feedback from partners that child was safe and visible

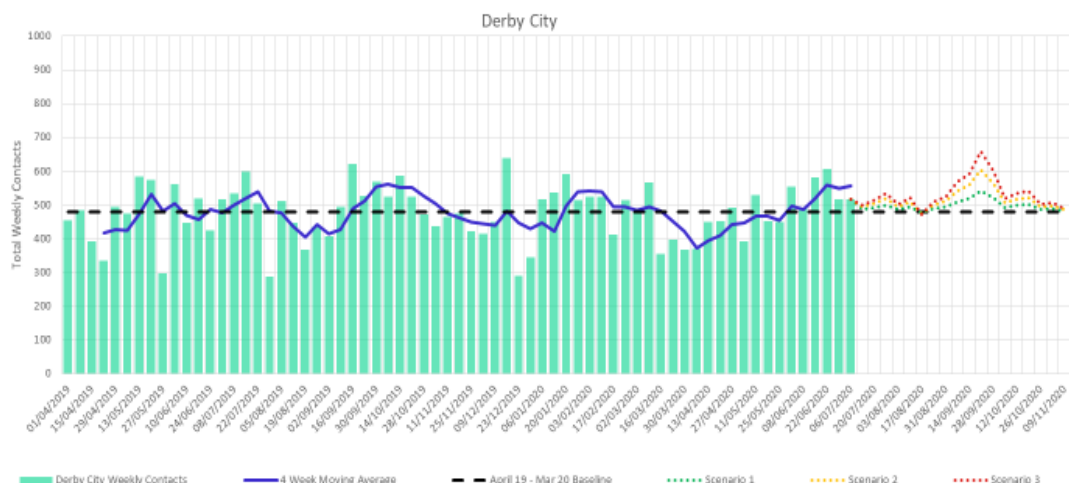
4.22 **Predicted Future Demand.** The Children’s Safeguarding Partnership have modelled potential demand arising from COVID 19. The Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Partnership is leading a City County response to predicted increases in contacts and referrals and actively challenging partners to work together and develop joint approach and solutions to manage demand and risks. The notion of co-ownership of future demand is at the heart of this work.

4.23

FUTURE MODELLING



Future Modelling of Demand
Considering what has happened during Covid-19 and what happens normally, what can we expect the future impact to be?



- 4.24 Derby resumed pre COVID levels of contacts and referrals by June 2020. The graph above predicts a spike around mid to late September coinciding with children returning to school. The overall volume has been modelled on 35%, 70% and 100% of absent referrals being realised. Given Derby resumed pre COVID levels fairly quickly, the level of spike is potentially lower than first anticipated. However, the overall prediction of continued higher than average weekly contacts is predicted to continue till at least December. The difference on this prediction is 512 in 2019 vs 658 2020 if comparing the same week.
- 4.25 In preparation
- The Reception service is in process of planning staffing to ensure sufficient cover is weighted towards those key weeks in September and will launch its profile with partners to assure there is clarity regarding function. (See appendix 1)
 - Locality teams are prioritising throughput of cases during August particularly to ensure capacity is established to receive new work arising from increased referrals.
 - Early Help will continue its existing support around schools through a cluster support arrangement.
 - Early Help will ensure there is a pre early help offer developed and delivered by Local Area Coordination to support universal services and the community's need to refer unnecessary cases into the local authority.
 - Children's Services will actively engage as part of the City's strategic approach to COVID recovery, through the Community strand to align with and develop new alliances in light of wider issues of poverty, homeless and unemployment becoming additional sources of families seeking local authority assistance. This strategic group of leaders will also shape and develop the City approach to Contextual Safeguarding.
- 4.26 **Future Operating Model and Recovery.** The Covid-19 Pandemic has imposed a new way of working for staff. As a disruptive force it has presented a challenge, which social workers, front line practitioners and managers met head on. The position of the authority during the pandemic, was to be digital by default, with staff working from home. The Operating Model established during the lockdown, was done so in order to provide duty cover and discharge some statutory duties. Moving into the recovery phase, it is necessary and proportionate to allow a wider range of frontline staff to attend the office and move towards a hybrid model. Social work is a team-based job: joint visiting, shared problem-solving, and mutual support aids professional development and mental wellbeing. When social workers have their own, dedicated office space, where they sit together, there is a shared urgency for the task in hand. (Jeyasingham, 2016). Furthermore, it encourages staff to hold and work with risk, to produce positive change. Unsupported social workers cannot hold risk, and this inevitably results in more children in care and higher cost. Furthermore, our Strengths Based practice model of delivery depends on the interactions, between staff, in the office. To change this model risks the culture change achieved towards the Strengths Based Approach adopted in 2019.

- 4.27 All internal meetings are being conducted by Skype and this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The restriction on meeting room capacity, because of safe distancing practice, significantly reduces availability of meeting rooms large enough to hold team meetings. Although some hybrid meetings are expected to commence, e.g. child protection conferences, where the social worker and chair are in the room with the family (at their request), but others join online. This practice will aid efficiency of partners and enable them to attend. There is scope to continue this practice, even when the virus no longer presents a danger. It will, however, not be right in all circumstances to hold remote meetings. In some cases, where mood and body language have to be observed, quickly, or people require reassurance, there will still need to be meetings in person.
Return to office working will commence in a structured way from September 2020.

- 4.28 Care Leavers. Examples of some of the work carried out by the PA's of work with SEND care leavers during the COVID 19. Please note names have been removed.

Case 1

Personal Advisor worked with Preparing For Adulthood worker and staff at the home to keep updated and stay in touch. Service user has autism and does not communicate verbally via telephone. Regular messaging took place, particularly WhatsApp to check in with him when he didn't engage. Regular conversations with mum after agreement from service user. Face to face visit took place with social distancing and risk assessment completed.

Case 2

Personal Advisor made direct contact weekly by telephone. Direct work completed with the service user benefits, accommodation and domestic abuse which has escalated during COVID 19. Regular contact with Preparing For Adulthood worker and together worked on plans for ensuring her needs are met daily. This was vital as the service user is chaotic but responded and engaged well with Personal Advisor and Adult Social Worker.

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.

Other significant implications

- 9.1 None identified.

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal	Olu Idowu HOS Legal Services	20 August 2020
Finance	Alison Parkin HOS Finance	24 August 2020
Service Director(s)	Suanne Lim, Service Director Early Help & Children's Social Care	13 August 2020
Report sponsor Other(s)	Andy Smith Strategic Director of People	16 August 2020