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Title	Children's Services and COVID-19
Purpose	Update from Children's Services during COVID-19 pandemic
Status	Information
Date	30 th April 2020

1. Workforce

Children's Services Workforce absences due to COVID-19 have reduced.

As at 30th April:

- 22 staff throughout the whole of the service were self-isolating due to being in a shielding or vulnerable group but are working from home undertaking partial duties. Of these 22 members of staff, 11 are in business-critical teams and are therefore unable to undertake face to face work including statutory visits.
- 1 member of staff was off work due to COVID-19 and not able or not well enough to undertake their role from home.

The testing process has had a positive impact on COVID-19 related staff absences in Children's Services. When staff have had mild symptoms but feel well or have had to self-isolate due to a family member having symptoms the testing service has meant that they are able to go back to work much sooner if they were confirmed negative for COVID-19.

Despite the very challenging and unique situation we are in due to COVID-19, we are extremely pleased to report that we have been able to recruit 3 permanent qualified social workers into our frontline teams. Once safer recruitment checks are undertaken start dates will be agreed. We continue to strive to reduce our reliance on agency workers and stabilise our workforce further through the appointment of permanent staff.

2. Early Help, Front Door, Assessment and EDT

The Front Door Service have seen an increase in the number of contacts and referrals being made in the last 2 weeks following an initial concerning quieter period when the schools closed. The Front Door service report that they are continuing to get progressively busier with an increase in Police and anonymous referrals. The Service

has a contingency plan to cope with a further increase in demand and staff from Early Help have been trained and systems set up so they can assist the Front Door Team with contacts being made.

This increase in referrals coincides with a recent communications campaign that Children's Services have undertaken across the County. The campaign encouraged residents to report any concerns they had about children, young people and adults in their communities as well as highlight domestic abuse services. Flyers have been distributed to households by Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations alongside a social media campaign.

An analysis of contacts and referrals to Front Door is currently being undertaken so that we can review and identify any trends and adapt our support services and communications in response to findings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new Covid-19 rota system commenced last week within the Assessment Team in direct response to COVID-19. The Team now work a split rota of days and evenings, this means that they can visit families at times in the evenings when it may be more convenient but also provide cover to the Emergency Duty Team. This will ensure that we are providing services to children, young people and their families in Powys at all times during this period.

Since the Early Help Service was reintroduced following the review of business-critical services, the team have been extremely busy getting out into the communities and undertaking face to face contacts and visits to support families. Communications went out to our partners and referrals are now coming via the Front Door service. The Early Help team are also undertaking their services directly to families virtually so that families that are self-isolating, can still receive help and support. Due to the increased risk of domestic abuse in homes at this current time, the team have created and allocated staff to an Early Help domestic abuse project and staff are identifying and proactively linking in with families at an early stage where there is the possibility or evidence of domestic abuse.

2. Care and Support, including Integrated Disability, Services

The Care and Support Service continues to be fully operational and is extremely busy.

In response to a number of babies being born and a lack of Parent and Baby unit placements available, Children's Services has developed an exciting new project within Powys. We have set up a community assessment centre for parents and their newborn babies, whilst we undertake assessments of their care and support needs. Support workers are providing assistance, parenting guidance and practical support to the new parents and social workers are visiting regularly to undertake assessments. By providing the service in house we are able to fully assess and support our parents and babies and the level of support required can be stepped up or down as needed. The property is also in our own County so families are being kept near or in their

communities and not being moved out of county or out of Wales. This project was set up in response to COVID-19 however since our first parent and baby have moved in we can already see the many benefits and we will be monitoring and evaluating the project closely as we believe it can positively shape the future way that we place and support parents and new born babies in Powys.

The Children's Services Family Time Service had to cease many of our face to face contacts due to the risks to our Children, Foster Carers and Staff because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Family Time team have been very creative and have looked into ways that children can still have contact with their families using Microsoft Teams and skype calls. The Courts and CAFCASS have continued to expect face to face contact to take place in the usual way. We understand the importance of children having regular, meaningful contact with their Families and this is a key part of practice. During these unprecedented times, face to face family time has been suspended in most cases. contacts are not possible to undertake safely. We are keeping this under continuous review.

Work is continuing to identify and support our high priority children and families. We are working closely with our colleagues in Education to increase participation in the Hubs and Social Workers are encouraging and supporting families to enable their children to attend. We are concerned that attendance of our priority children is very low and feedback from families is that they are fearful of sending their children due to COVID-19. We continue to work with families to address barriers to attendance at the hubs and have committed to paying for meals at the hub for all our priority children who are not entitled to Free School Meals.

The Care and Support team are constantly reviewing each individual child's situation and our staff are providing support and intervention work to keep them safe and to prevent situations escalating at this very difficult time for families. Our teams continue their work with children to achieve their goals and home visits are taking place on an increased basis.

3 Corporate Parenting

The Through Care teams and Fostering teams continue to be fully operational.

Placement stability continues to be a priority for the service especially during this difficult time of uncertainty for all children and young people. As part of our COVID-19 business continuity planning Children's Services were able to temporarily secure a house within the County that could be used as an emergency placement for Children and Young People. Our Children's Commissioning Service worked tirelessly and in a very short period of time ensured the house was ready and on standby if required. This is an example of another innovative project that Children's Services have set up due to COVID-19 and is providing placements within our community. The house is

being utilised. This has meant that we have been able to keep family members together safely in their communities with the support of our own Social Workers and Support Workers. This is another example of how, even in these times, we continue to 'work with' families rather than 'do to'.

Despite COVID-19, our work to deliver our Closer to Home strategy is continuing. The children's home in Ystradgynlais is progressing well and a recruitment drive for staff has taken place with interviews taking place shortly, virtually. Given the current situation we are in, the progress made has been excellent and highlights our commitment to our Closer to Home strategy.

The Fostering Panels have continued and are being held virtually. Foster Carer recruitment remains a priority to the Service. We recognise the added pressure on our Foster Carers with schools being closed and the Fostering Team are in regularly contact and providing support.

In partnership with our colleagues in Education a new package of support has been offered to foster carers. The Educational Psychologist Team are contacting our foster carers and offering behavioural and emotional advice and support over skype/teams. They are also linking in with the staff from each child's own school to offer help and advice with home schooling if required.

A virtual youth club is being set up in partnership with the Youth Service for our Young People who are looked after. The youth club will be held weekly but split into North, Mid and South Powys and the first group is planned to take place the week commencing 11th May. The Children's Services Participation and Engagement Officer is promoting the clubs and the Youth Service workers will facilitate them. At present the club doesn't have a name as it was agreed that the Young People will decide this when they meet for the first time. COVID-19 is a very difficult time for all Young People but for Children Looked After this can be a very isolating time and the aim of the club is to bring our Young People together who are in the same situation to be able to create a new support network.

The Adoption Service is continuing to function and at present the service is business planning to increase recruitment of new adoptive parents when the assessment process can be resumed.

4. Intervention and Prevention, including Youth Justice, Services

The Youth Justice Service is continuing to work with Children and Young People. We are also engaging in regional work.

The Intervention and Prevention teams that have been redeployed to our Care and Support and Through Care teams continue to provide a high level of support and intervention work to families.

The new Clinical Psychologist, in a joint project with PTHB and Powys Children's Services, started in post in April. The Clinical Psychologist will provide advice and support to our Intervention and Prevention teams on a generic and individual case by case basis. He will support our Edge of Care, Court, Through Care and Adoption Support work.

5. Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

Safeguarding work continues as business as usual and there are no issues reported with the running of child protection conferences virtually. Partners are attending and reports being provided.

WCCIS continues to be a real concern. The slow running, down times and general poor functionality of the system continues to have an operational impact.

Work has taken place on the launch of the Mind of My Own app in May. The app will enable Young People to express their wishes and feelings which will support their engagement in their own care plans. This was postponed due to the COVID-19 response but we have worked with the company that runs the app to provide the training to staff virtually as we feel it is more important now than ever that Children and Young People have a voice and are provided with multiple ways of expressing their views.

The Regional Safeguarding Board and the Powys Local Operating Group met this week.