

SBAR report to Silver and Gold Commands

Risks to children during the Covid-19 pandemic

Situation:

- Education plays a significant role in child protection with teachers normally having 5 day a week contact with the child. School closures and the restrictions on movement will dramatically change the child's routine and reduce opportunities to identify abuse.
- Additional stressors will be placed on parents who may experience additional caring responsibilities for vulnerable or sick family members and a loss of contact with wider family networks, friendships and support services.
- Children and adults who live with domestic abuse will be isolated in the household with the perpetrator for a prolonged period. They will have difficulties in speaking out about worries or incidents and feel unable to speak with staff if the perpetrator is in the household when visits occur.
- Children who are experiencing sexual abuse within the household e.g. parent, stepparent or sibling will have no respite from the perpetrator.
- Similarly, with physical abuse and emotional abuse.
- Children who experience neglect may not be having regular meals and their wellbeing will not be being monitored by education and health staff who would normally have contact with them and the family.
- Heightened levels of anxiety and depression amongst family members may occur. Normal support networks will have diminished and families may feel increased tension at the lack of space and ability to take a break from parenting.

Background:

As part of the business continuity plan initial action was taken to consider how services could be delivered with a significantly reduced workforce. This led to emergency changes to service provision which reduced early help and preventative support so high-risk cases could be closely monitored.

Children's services have quickly responded to COVID-19 by closing offices and ensuring staff work from home to reduce the spread of infection. Staff sickness levels are being monitored daily and redeployment plans were developed.

Early re-deployment efforts were required to ensure EDT and our children's residential home maintained required support levels.

After monitoring this situation for 3 weeks, it is now felt that as sickness levels amongst the workforce have been stable and the situation should be reviewed.

This is particularly pertinent as the childcare hubs have not been utilised by many children who are identified as vulnerable.

As part of the daily review of the COVID-19 pandemic and increased evidence of domestic abuse increases across countries and concerns about a drop in police and CS referrals, a range of actions have been identified by the Children's Services Leadership Team.

When the business continuity plan was put in place, there was no access to PPE. There are arrangements now in place for staff to access PPE.

ACTIONS:

- Weekly analysis of direct contact with children
- Re-introducing early help and prevention services for cases of concern – particularly families where domestic abuse is known. This will involve staff spending time alone with children wherever possible.
- Daily visits for cases identified as concerning – regardless of the CP registration status
- Ensuring the front door threshold is maintained and all cases reaching the eligibility criteria for an assessment of their care and support needs are able to access a service
- Ensuring that care and wellbeing assessments continue for cases of concern
- Altering the way in which children who are eligible for free school meals are accessing food vouchers if they do not attend the hubs, by changing this to being delivered food parcels by CS staff to encourage and enable direct contact with children and family members.
- Increased encouragement for children of open cases to attend childcare hubs through writing to all families to inform them of the benefits of attending and support they will receive to attend. Social workers will contact all families by telephone to ensure there are no barriers to registering or attending.
- Additional ideas are being progressed to work with community organisations such as outward-bound centres to support staff spending time with children outside of the family home.
- Communications plan to raise awareness of domestic abuse and child abuse identification and reporting to Powys residents.
- Training for council staff, C-SERT volunteers around the identification of child abuse and domestic abuse.
- Be clear about the requirement for PPE going forward.
- Senior Managers to ensure that these plans are immediately developed and implemented.
- All the actions will be reviewed daily to ensure they are progressing.

- The above actions will commence from the 14th April 2020

Recommendations:

1. For Children's Services business-critical services to be amended to include:
 - Early help
 - IFST
 - Usual threshold for assessment applied at front door
 - Undertaking of all care and wellbeing assessments in line with usual thresholds
 - More frequent face to face visits to be reinstated
2. For Silver Command to support the communication with council workforce, volunteers and the public around identifying and supporting child abuse and domestic abuse
3. For Silver and Gold Commands to approve the changes to Children's Services business critical activities identified in this report

Prepared by Jan Coles

14th April 2020