

Circulation	Cllr Rachel Powell, Portfolio Member for Young People & Culture Ali Bulman, Corporate Director of Social Services
From	Jan Coles Head of Children's Services
Title	Children's Services and COVID-19
Purpose	Update from Children's Services during COVID-19 pandemic
Status	Information
Date	15 th May 2020

1. Workforce

Children's Services Workforce absences due to COVID-19 have reduced further and as at 15th May 2020:

- 19 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 19 members of staff, 10 are in business-critical teams and are therefore unable to undertake face to face work including statutory visits.
- There are no staff absent from work in the service due to COVID-19.

As of the end of April 2020 the number of agency staff being employed had reduced to 29, this is a reduction from 45 in September 2019. This evidences the impact of the work the service has undertaken to stabilise the workforce and recruit permanent social workers. The Service has plans to pick back up the 'Grow our own Social Workers' project work that was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

During April the service had 3.8 FTE new staff starters and no leavers for the second consecutive month. Alongside this the average days sickness is reported at 0.8 days per FTE for April, this is lowest figure for the last 12 months. In April there were 4 compliments and 3 complaints received.

2. Early Help, Front Door, Assessment and EDT

The Early Help Service are continuing to work with families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and referrals are reported to be increasing. The Early Help service are using alternative and innovative ways to support and work with families virtually. Home visits have been reduced but are still taking place based on the requests and needs of families.

A piece of analysis work has been undertaken by the Early Help staff on 927 children that received direct work (not including group work) from the team during the last

financial year. Of those 927 children only 64 children were referred back for statutory assessment. For and 50 of these children the reason was that their families did not engage with Early Help. This evidences the efficacy of the work the Early Help team are undertaking alongside families.

Contacts to the Children's Services Front Door have continued to increase following the initial quieter period at the start of lockdown. In April there were a total of 393 contacts to the Front Door Service and of these 87% were managed and supported through information, advice and Early Help services and not referred to statutory services.

The domestic abuse project group continues to meet to ensure that we are addressing the very concerning reported increase in domestic abuse in homes caused by lockdown. The group's focus is on getting information, about services that are available to help, out to the community without increasing the risk to families.

The temporary arrangements for the Emergency Duty Team rota which integrated the Assessment Team are continuing and there are some benefits. This will continue to be reviewed.

2. Care and Support, including Integrated Disability, Services

The Care and Support Services continue to be fully operational and are very busy ensuring children and families are kept safe. In April 2020 the percentage of child protection visits that were carried out in timescale was 97%. The teams have worked extremely hard and undertook 306 child protection visits in total which is exceptional considering the challenges they are facing due to lockdown and COVID-19.

The new parent and baby placement project in Powys that was set up in response to COVID-19 has so far seen very positive results. The families are being supported in the placement by Children's Services staff and Health colleagues are also visiting the families regularly.

We understand the importance of children having regular, meaningful contact with their families and this is a key part of our work. Therefore, we are currently reviewing, on a case by case basis, the contact arrangements for every child, to risk assess whether and how face to face Family Time can take place safely for children and their parents.

Work is continuing to identify and support our high priority children and families. We are supporting families and encouraging families to increase participation in the Hubs where appropriate. Attendance for children who come under the Welsh Government 'vulnerable' definition has increased but does still remain at low levels in Powys, there

are currently 38 children registered and attendance varies with 23 children booked in for the week commencing 18th May.

3 Corporate Parenting

The Corporate Parenting teams continue to be fully operational. The percentage of children looked after statutory visits carried in timescale was 92% in April. This has consistently been above 90% since August 2019.

Placement stability continues to be a priority for the service. The percentage of children looked after who have had three or more placements during the year was recorded in April as 4% for the second consecutive month. This performance indicator continues to be consistently well below the national average in Wales. This evidences our work around increasing stability in children's lives.

The Closer to Home project work continues and although there were no placement step downs in April due to logistical problems caused by COVID-19, the work is being undertaken to prepare placements and children and young people. The new Children's Home in Powys continues to be developed and following a recruitment drive staff have been appointed for when the first of the homes is ready to open in the South of the County.

The Fostering Team continue to keep in touch with all our Foster Carers to provide as much support as is needed during this difficult and stressful time. The recruitment drive for new foster carers continues despite COVID-19 and in April there were 27 enquiries made to the service about becoming a foster carer.

The Adoption Service is continuing to operate, however across the region there has been a diminished number of applications to adopt being received, which is very concerning.

4. Intervention and Prevention, including Youth Justice, Services

Intervention and prevention services are continuing for children, young people and families, staff have been redeployed to Care and Support and Through Care teams to provide these vital support services whilst the service is in business continuity mode.

Communication has gone out to all redeployed staff thanking them for their commitment and flexibility during this difficult time and also offering reassurance that they will return to their substantive teams when we begin to return to business as usual. This is being continuously reviewed by Children's Leadership Team.

5. Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

Safeguarding work continues as business as usual. Virtual child protection conferences and looked after children reviews are going well and feedback from partners has been positive.

Regional meetings with multi agency partners have continued and activity is increasing with sub-groups being restarted. Powys Children's Services were due to be the lead for the Regional Safeguarding Conference later this year, but due to COVID-19 this has been cancelled. Instead the Region is planning a series of Webinars across the week which we will be involved in the planning of.

During the COVID-19 response it is important that we continue to develop our workforce. As face to face training has had to be put on hold, we have developed and run over 20 webinars since the start of lockdown on a range of practice themes. The webinar's have been recorded and will be stored in a shared area so that they can be viewed again by staff. This way of blended learning could shape our future training programme after COVID-19.

6. Children's Commissioning

There are now 28 Early Years settings open for the children of key workers and vulnerable children across the County. Due to demand an additional setting was opened in Welshpool last week which has been very well received, with the majority of children in this setting being in the WG 'vulnerable' category.

The Children's Commissioning Team are keeping in regular contact with providers to ensure that placements remain stable. Providers are also kept up to date and receive communications about relevant PPE and COVID-19 testing.