



Nottingham

City Council

The impact of Covid 19 on services to children in care

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27th July 2020



Visits to Children in Care

- One of the first tasks undertaken was to issue staff across Children's Integrated Services setting out what was expected in relation to visits. Each case then had a risk assessment to establish what contact should look like. In some cases contact has remained face to face throughout.
- Individual risk assessments were completed for all children in care and all care leavers. These are being reviewed in line with new guidance and as the circumstances of the young people change. These include any changes in school attendance or contact and with birth family.
- Initially we increased the frequency of contact to every two weeks so that we were confident children and their carers were being supported. Feedback from children in settled placements was that this was too frequent and so we have reduced this where appropriate.
- Most visits to children in care have been virtual, which some children are telling us that they prefer
- Where we need to visit children face to face we have continued to do so. We quickly sourced PPE so that staff were able to do this

The Impact on Other Teams

- Child in Care reviews are virtual. This was initially problematic whilst we resolved the IT issues but these were quickly resolved and are now working well. Again some children are telling us that they prefer this approach.
- Children in care CAMHS are still undertaking some face to face work but this is limited and some children find accessing sessions in these circumstances challenging. The team have developed resources to support foster carers and young people impacted by lock down.
- Support for foster carers has again been mainly virtual, although face to face visits have continued where deemed necessary. We have continued our recruitment drive, using zoom to host virtual recruitment events.
- Internal residential care was particularly impacted by staff shielding or living with someone who was. We re-deployed staff from Crocus Fields and youth and play to support the service which worked well. Staff are now returning to work given that shielding requirements are reducing. We are concerned about the potential impact of local lockdown measures on children's residential care and are working closely with public health colleagues to enable us to respond if needs be.

Wider Impacts

- Child in Care medicals have continued but are virtual. Recovery plans are currently being implemented that will see this returning to face to face service
- The Court process has been delayed given the complexities of social distancing. This has delayed final outcomes for some children although we have still been able to progress plans where cases are less complex and do not require face to face hearings
- Adoption work has continued , although lodging applications have been impacted by the delay in court processes and we have had to find creative ways to help children transition from foster care to adoptive placements.
- Although a number of foster careers have reported positive consequences from lock down we have seen some placements breakdown. The children's placement market is particularly challenging which has made it harder to find placements, particularly for older children or those with complex needs. We have recently agreed to undertake a commissioning review to look at placement availability.

Regulatory Flexibility

The Department for Education introduced a range of flexibilities to the regulatory framework governing work with children in care. The City Council has not utilised the overwhelming majority of these. The only ones we have adopted are

- We are using health self-declaration from potential foster carers to progress fostering assessments. We have logged all of those assessments where this approach has been necessary and will re-visit the assessments when GP surgeries return to normal
- First reviews of Foster Carers where there are no concerns or issues are going straight to the Agency Decision Maker, who in the City is independently employed for this role, rather than going via the Fostering Panel
- The number of Panel members has been reduced from 6 members to 5 the quoracy before Covid regulations is 5. We are still within the regulations but if a member is not able to attend panel there is the flexibility to use the temporary measures until September 2020 The guidelines states the quoracy of panel is 3 panel members.
- Independent visits (Regulation 44) to Children's homes have continued to be monthly but are virtual