



Report to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

Impact of Covid on Children's Services (Update)

Background

At July's Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee, a report was presented outlining the Impact of Coronavirus on services for children and young people. This report provides an update on any changes since this meeting.

At this meeting the Committee recommended that the service speak to young people and their families about their experiences and perspectives of services during this period with a view to using that information to inform decision making on:

- Current provision
- Restoration of services
- Planning for any future lockdown
- Restrictions

This report also provides an update on work to date.

Updates since the last Meeting

Early Help

During the pandemic, the Early Help team have put together alternative delivery models into practice to support families during challenges times of social distancing measures. We have ensured our service continued to offer the Right Support at the Right Time.

Following parent feedback about worries of isolation, lack of play opportunities for children, lack of social opportunities, financial worries and wanting to be kept informed about what is happening, Early Help have worked hard to:

- Enhanced the virtual offer and telephone contacts with families, Early Help created a virtual timetable full of activity ideas, videos, lunch recipes and online links to support the home learning environment.
- Expanded on communication and reach channels to the digital world, creating and setting up a Facebook Page for families and professionals, allowing key updates, messages, activities and ideas to be shared wider.
- Provided approximately 420+ resource and activity packs to vulnerable children and families to extend and build on their learning and development at home.
- Adapted the Peep Learning Together evidenced based Programme to allow families to access this virtually via weekly telephone calls, planned activities, support and advice to parents in order to empower them to make the most of everyday learning opportunities. At the time of writing (04/09/2020), 120 families have been invited to participate in this programme.
- Provided virtual Family Support Clinics, which use a whole family and holistic model in order to assess and offer advice and support across a spectrum of challenges they may be facing.

Parents also expressed concerns about managing children's behaviours when they were not in school, increase in parental Mental Health concerns, relationship concerns and increased Domestic abuse. Early and Targeted Help have:

- Continued to provide an allocated Family Support Worker to families with multiple support needs.
- Adapted the delivery of the Triple P Parenting Programme to offer virtual one to one support via Triple P Primary Care Sheets and Triple P online. At the time of writing (04/09/2020) 136 families have been contacted in order to access this support and 11 families have been offered Triple P online.
- Worked in conjunction with Professor David Daley (co-founder of New Forest Parenting Programme) to enable us to continue to deliver an evidenced based programme virtually. 48 families have been identified as requiring this support as their children display ADHD type behaviours.
- Supported and been in weekly contact with 129 women who have been referred to the service in order to access the Freedom Programme. We have completed safety plans and offered ongoing advice and support during this critical time. In addition to this, Early Help have completed bespoke one to one sessions in order to support statutory services and court proceedings.

Family Intervention Project (FIP)

FIP have continued to provide a service into people's homes following the usual safeguards being put in place. The main issue for FIP team has been accessing council or health premises to undertake one-to-one work with individuals outside the home. Multi-agency meetings have continued but using MS Teams. The team have also run successfully Family Group Conferences via Teams where some of the family members participated from a local school supported by one of the workers.

Parenting Team

Initially all group programmes were put on hold and delivery was via telephone on a one-to-one basis depending on need.

Within 4 weeks delivery had moved into video-conferencing either via MSTeams or Zoom, delivering both one-to-one sessions and to groups of not more than 6 parents.

The approach brings in significant costs savings for the council in the reduction in costs around venues and staff travel. Staff report being able to undertake more sessions with service users due to the time saved from travel and preparing venues..

Virtual delivery is not suitable for all families and 'post lockdown' we will continue to deliver some groups.

Placement Stability

A key and ongoing challenge during the pandemic has been the availability of placements for children in care and the increasing risk of placement breakdown during lockdown. Key performance measures show a decline in placement stability for children during this time and we know that finding a good 'match' for children during this time has led to an increase in the use of independent fostering and external residential placements to enable us to meet the child's needs. Throughout this time, we have continued to work to develop innovative solutions with carers and partners to prevent placement breakdown. Ongoing work through our work across the region and sub-region (D2N2 area) is working to address the challenges in local provision. Our Social

Impact Bond is being implemented during autumn 2020 to provide support on a payment by results basis to facilitate step-down from residential care, prevent placement breakdown and support reunification with family. We have also started a commissioning and sufficiency review to strengthen this work further.

Care Leavers

Our Leaving Care Service has continued to keep in touch with care leavers and visit our most vulnerable young people. Challenges were identified early in relation to the availability of housing options to support the transition of care leavers during this period. To address this, we have ensured that placements for our care leavers have been extended to respond to the delays in housing offers. Whilst contact has been maintained, there have been some challenges in visiting care leavers who are currently in prison due to the restrictions in access. This has impacted on our ability to visit and update Pathway Plans for some young people.

Youth Justice Service

Nottingham's Youth Justice Service (YJS) continued to provide socially-distanced, face to face visits for the high risk cohort, with regular virtual contact maintained for low and medium risk cases. The Exploitation and Violence Reduction (EVR) Hub, a preventative service based within YJS, continued to provide outreach support for young people on their caseload. The service moved key functions, e.g. the Out of Court Disposal Panel, to a virtual delivery to enable continued operation and partnership coordination throughout lockdown. The service have also continued to innovate and deliver key improvements following the HMIP inspection e.g. embedding their trauma-informed practice approach, continued implementation of the SkillMill project and roll out of a new Multi-Systemic Therapy programme to work with children at risk of involvement with youth crime and exploitation. They have also been successful in securing further Youth Endowment Funding to enable delivery of outreach support to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown for young people.

Health Services

Some health services for Children in Care have been impacted by Covid-19, impacting on some measures including health and dental assessments. Whilst health assessments have been continuing through lockdown, these have been conducted virtually and capacity has been a challenge. There has been ongoing joint work with health colleagues to reinstate face to face health assessments but those children who have received a virtual Initial Health Assessment during lockdown will need to be seen and recovery plans will impact future capacity as clinics will need reflect new guidance regarding safe operating models. Dental treatment has been available in emergencies only during lockdown. Whilst we are now able to request dental appointments, there is likely to be some delays in accessing dental appointments as clinics respond to a significant backlog.

Courts

The lockdown and closure of Courts has led to delays in securing permanence for some children with a plan for adoption due to delays and changes in the courts. Backlogs for Courts are now an issue nationally, with significant delays in the dates available for final adoption hearings, particularly where they are contested by the birth family and where parties need to be present in Court. Monthly Adoption Tracking meetings to ensure planning and work is as prompt as possible have continued, chaired by the Director for Children's Integrated Services to maintain oversight for this cohort. Despite these challenges, we have continued to progress plans and place children with their adoptive

families during lockdown, working with adoptive parents and carers to manage this safely and effectively. Adopters and fostering families have to self isolate for a period before we can introduce them and they then work as a “bubble” together until the end of introductions. 14 children have been successfully placed with families during lockdown.

Feedback from Children and Families

Nottingham City Educational Psychology Service

Nottingham City Educational Psychology Service undertook a survey to seek the views of children and young people in the Covid-19 pandemic. Further detail on this survey is outlined within the ‘Re-opening of Schools and Impact of Closure’ report.

Early Help

Some parents have really liked the virtual and self-help parenting programme offer as they can manage their time & childcare needs around the programme. Early Help plan to continue offering some virtual/ self-help programmes in the future.

Some parents say they can’t wait for face to face sessions to start as they feel the lack of socialisation opportunities has impacted on their child’s social development and their own mental health.

The Freedom Programme has not been delivered during Covid due to the risks that the perpetrator or children may overhear confidential conversations. These parents have all expressed they want group sessions to re-start soon.

The Early Help Facebook page continues to be established, with increasing numbers of likes and followers – parents are influencing the themes of posts.

Early Help are currently planning an evaluation of the Early Help Covid offer with families to review how services are offered in the future.

Parenting Team

Initially all group programmes were put on hold and delivery was via telephone on a one-to-one basis. Within 4 weeks delivery had moved into video-conferencing either via MSTeams or Zoom, delivering both one-to-one sessions and to groups of not more than 6 parents.

Although we were concerned about how parents would engage with this method the feedback has been overwhelming positive. Surprisingly our engagement and retention rate from this approach has at least mirrored, if not improved, on our previous face-to-face offer. Parents report the following advantages:

- Ease of access i.e. don’t need to travel to a venue
- Child care issues - easier to resolve in the home environment
- Delivery easier to accomplish around family work commitments – some groups and one-to-one sessions delivered in an evening or at weekends
- Parents less anxious at joining a virtual group than a live group

Feedback from families:

Thank you very much for the sessions I have had, I have learnt so many ways of parenting over the weeks. I have also learnt how to be calm and different skills of approaching a situation as and when it presents itself. Thank you for all the additional information on how to be a good parent, the communication skills I have gained from these sessions are amazing because the relationship I have with all the children has developed into something incredible. I will keep enforcing all the skills that I have learnt because this program has proven to be valuable. The last statement I would like to share with you is that I do not have to shout for my children to listen to me.

The support I have had from the parenting team has been very positive. I have found the sessions helpful, Helen was able to tailor the strategies and parenting advice to meet the needs of our family.

Helen talked to my son who never normally speaks to adults, over Zoom (MS Teams) to get his views, and to find out what he would like to be different. I think this has been key to the positive changes for our family. I am looking forward to taking part in a group webinar to be able to share learning and experiences with other parents as I think there is value in this. As a working parent, the Zoom (MS Teams) calls have enabled me to take part in sessions around my work and childcare commitments.

In conclusion, Children's Integrated Services were required to adjust considerably under Covid-19 restrictions and this clearly reduced the direct face to face contact services were able to offer to children and families. We have sought feedback to understand how this has been experienced. Whilst there has clearly been a gap in the reduction in face to face contact, and reinstatement of services is welcomed, we have also learned that using technology to engage also offers opportunities which are welcomed. We will be assessing how this may be incorporated appropriately into future practice.

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