

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee
4th November 2020

Report of the Acting Director of Children’s Services

Children’s Services response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Purpose

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| 1. | The purpose of this report is to update on the Children’s Services response to the Covid-19 Pandemic. |
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Recommendations

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| 2. | <p>It is recommended that: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny note the contents of this report. • Scrutiny recognise the unprecedented challenges faced by Childrens Services and the way in which staff have responded • Scrutiny endorse the Childrens Services response to Covid-19 and recognise that this new way of working will continue for the foreseeable future |
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Background

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| 3. | <p>Since March 2020 Childrens Services alongside the rest of the Council have had to change practice and how we offer services to children, young people and their families. We continue to work to ensure all our children receive the support they need in a timely fashion. As well as trying to deliver services during a pandemic we have continued to improve our SEND services, assess what our education model should look like going forward, support all of early years, schools and post 16 providers through Covid-19 and deliver social care services. In terms of social care services, we have carried out a sense check to ensure our improvement plan targets the right areas.</p> |
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	<u>Childrens Social Care</u>
4.	We have been fortunate in Children’s Services in that we have not had much of a reduction in staffing levels due to Covid-19. Whilst we have had some staff shielding, this has not impacted them continuing to work in a virtual way. At any one time, out of a workforce of 193.75 fte, there have only been between 5 and 6 members of staff unavailable to work due to Covid-19.
5.	It has been important for senior leaders to support our workforce during this period to maintain their health and well-being. As such we have undertaken several senior manager engagement sessions with managers and practitioners across Children’s Services to share information and ‘check in’ on how staff are. We have included support and guidance from our Public Health colleagues and Dudley Council’s Staff Counselling Service. Staff Counselling Service information has also been cascaded through the Centre for Professional Practice (CPP). We have continued with our new Practitioner Forums during the pandemic, which has enabled us to directly from practitioners on the front line.
6.	We have heard of, and shared good examples of, how teams have met virtually e.g. ‘virtual coffee breaks’ and one team met briefly in a green space. They have found these opportunities to be good for their emotional well-being. Some new staff starting with us have had face to face meetings with a manager or Service Manager as part of their induction. We have continued to offer virtual inductions through CPP. Further work is being undertaken around induction. During the early part of the pandemic, CPP conducted a staff survey via telephone calls to ‘check in’ with staff and to see how they were. We have moved to virtual forums, which allows us to meet in larger groups, to see faces and to discuss issues together.
7.	Staff have had Covid-19 discussions with their managers at the beginning of the pandemic and adjustments made to working patterns for social workers if required to suit their own personal circumstances and challenges around working from home.
	<u>Working virtually – challenges and successes</u>
8.	Working in a virtual way has come with some challenges but has also brought some advantages. One of the big issues identified through our staff forums has been feelings of isolation and challenges with juggling the care of children, whilst working at home. Some teams have developed ways of supporting each other as a team virtually and team meetings have continued online. The network can at times cause difficulties as workers can be frozen / thrown out of the system. ICT are aware of this and are working to address this issue.

9.	Some staff have enjoyed not having to commute to work and the ease at arranging meetings with colleagues and partners virtually has been an advantage. Without traveling around the Borough, time has been saved. Some staff have felt that their work life balance has improved due to reduced travelling time, whilst others have found the boundaries blurred when their 'office' is now within the home. It is important that as we move into autumn and beyond, that we are able to learn from our experiences and retain the best parts of our new ways of working and find solutions to any prevalent issues.
	<u>Business as usual</u>
10.	Performance meetings have continued across Children's Social Care during the pandemic to ensure that we are driving a performance culture. We have continued to work on our Directorate Performance Scorecard to ensure that we are measuring the right things and sharing key priorities with teams.
11.	The MASH has continued to operate throughout the period remotely, with continued engagement from partners through the MASH Operational Group and a range of other regular meetings through Microsoft Teams.
12.	Child Protection Conferences and Children Looked After Reviews have continued to take place within statutory timescales, in line with performance pre-lockdown, albeit virtually since 25th March 2020. This has included the use of WebEx, Microsoft Teams, Jabber, Telephone Conferencing and WhatsApp. The expectation has been that Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) contact all children and parents via telephone prior to the virtual meeting. Other professionals have then joined virtual meetings. Partnership meetings to monitor attendance at children's meetings have taken place monthly throughout the pandemic and positive working relationships are being developed and good practice shared, including the DSPP attending the next meeting to share the Multi-Agency Escalations Process. We have listened to partners concerns about travelling between Child Protection Conference venues and the pandemic has enabled us to envisage a "hybrid" model of multi-agency meetings where some participants attend in person and some attend virtually. We are progressing plans to install screens in our Conference rooms to allow this to take place.
13.	The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 came into force on 24 th April. Within these regulations, each Local Authority were allowed to temporarily relax 10 sets of existing regulations. We took the decision not to utilise these flexibilities and to continue with business as usual. We felt that to do so would not be in the interest of children and young people and was likely to lead to a diluted service offer.
14.	A new schedule of meetings has been developed to ensure that there is consistency across Children's Social Care. There is now clarity around a series of meetings for all levels of staff, from team meetings to quarterly meetings with the Assistant Director and Heads of Service.

	<u>Engagement with children, young people and their families</u>
15.	We have continued to engage with our most vulnerable and at-risk children and young people throughout the pandemic. All children and young people were spoken to virtually or through a variety of safe methods, such as in gardens, through going for a walk with their social worker or engaging in confidential and sensitive doorstep discussions. Many creative ways have been seen throughout the pandemic to keep staff and families safe.
16.	Social workers and YPA's have utilised the video technology on WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams to engage children and young people with virtual video visits. IRO's have also seen an increase in engagement with young people, in particular using virtual technology. Some social workers have written letters to children with photos, to introduce themselves before a visit or virtual visit in an attempt to broaden opportunities for children to get to know them and to build rapport.
17.	The Safeguarding and Review Service (Independent Reviewing Officer Service) conducted a survey of 40 parents whose children were subject to child protection plans, during the pandemic. We found that some parents preferred the virtual child protection conferences, as they found them to be less intimidating. We will use their feedback to improve the service.
	<u>Visits to children and progressing their plans</u>
18.	Social workers have continued to follow guidance from our Public Health colleagues in relation to how we conduct visits to families. During the pandemic, cases were RAG rated to identify levels of risk for children not in school. This helped managers to prioritise work and to keep focus upon the children and young people that were most vulnerable. All known children and families continued to receive a service from Children's Social Care. Many visits were initially undertaken virtually, unless there were child protection concerns requiring a child protection investigation or where children have been removed from parent's care. Where visits have been undertaken in the home Public Health guidance has been followed and PPE has been used. Staff have been able access PPE when required.
19.	Risk assessments considered the views of young people, known risks, unassessed risks, whether partners would be visiting, whether vulnerable children were attending school and the views of partner agencies etc.
20.	Government guidance changed on 15 th July to state that visits to children and families should prioritise face to face visits, we have adhered to that directive. Over time, we have increased our visits within the home and Children's Social Care is now operating on a business as usual basis. Therefore, children and young people are being monitored through routine management oversight and performance reporting.

21.	Social workers and their managers continue to make decisions about visits on a daily basis. Due to other agencies withdrawing face to face support, this has at times lead to social workers and Young Persons' Advisers having to increase their level of visiting to fill the gap for the children and young people.
22.	When children and young people have needed to move placements during the pandemic, social workers have done this with their own vehicles. It has not been possible to maintain social distancing when moving children to a new placement, but judgements have been made about the use of PPE. Of course, social worker judgements have had to consider the impact upon children of mask wearing at a time when children are being removed from their parents and likely to be distressed. Social workers have discussed these situations with team managers and 'moving' plans have been put into place that have considered Covid-19 restrictions.
23.	During the pandemic social workers were required to encourage parents of vulnerable children to send children to school. Much work was also being undertaken by our colleagues in Education Outcomes and the Schools themselves. Nationally and in Dudley there were challenges in getting all vulnerable children into school. The interactions between schools and social workers has been good throughout this period to ensure a shared understanding of any issues with particular families.
	<u>Family Time (Contact Centres)</u>
24.	From 24 th March to 31 st July 2020 the Contact Service was not operational due to Covid-19. However, the contact staff were deployed to support other service areas. The staff supported the Care Leavers Team by 'buddying up' with young people to offer them emotional support via the telephone. They also hand delivered art packs from the Art Council to children looked after within the Dudley area.
25.	Since 31 st July a phased opening of services has begun with 40 Court directed face to face contact sessions taking place. Covid-19 risk assessments stipulated that only a maximum of 15 people were allowed in the building at any one time. In addition to face to face contacts, community and virtual contacts were also occurring. Since then Saturday contact has been offered as well as the re-opening of the Brierley Bears Contact Centre at the end of August. Currently, in total between Blowers Green and Brierley Bears Contact Centres have offered 50 face to face contact slots. Pre Covid-19, the usual amount offered was 120. The service is therefore currently offering less than 50% of the normal provision.
26.	On 4 th September a site visit by Service Manager Wendi Grizzle and Health & Safety established that a further two rooms at Blowers Green contact centre could now be reopened. This then potentially could offer an extra 10 afterschool contact slots (this is the time of day that is currently being requested). Added to this, there is still scope for further contacts to be undertaken within the community if PHE/Government guidance allow.

Contacts in MASH during the pandemic compared to 2019

27. 2019

(Excluding Police DA contacts)

	EDT	MASH	All
April	156	596	752
May	158	590	748
June	129	569	698
July	130	529	659
August	151	329	480

2020

(Excluding Police DA contacts)

	EDT	MASH	All
April	118	578	696
May	81	680	761
June	130	842	972
July	167	830	997
August	214	622	836

Contacts (not Domestic Abuse)

28. As a result of school closures and lock down, numbers of contacts to front door services and EDT had previously fallen significantly in April and early May 2020, by approximately 25-30% on the previous year's levels. Since mid-May however numbers have been higher than normal which can be seen in the tables above. The tables of data provided for 2019 and 2020 shows that contacts for June to August this year (nearly 1000 in July) now significantly outnumber those for the same months in 2019 (660 for July).

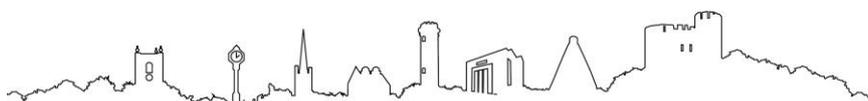
29. In 2019 schools were the biggest source of contacts received between June and August (recognising that there would have been far fewer in the month of August) with 19% of all contacts being from schools. Between June and August 2020 only 7% of contacts received were from schools. Understandably, this was due to less children being in school. Health is usually the third highest source of contacts received. In the last three months however large numbers of contacts were received from Health partners (676 compared with 294 in the same three months in the previous year. Police contacts (non DA) have also increased significantly as have contacts from 'Other' Departments within the LA and Housing. The MASH Operational Group met on 9th September to develop plans to analyse the contacts and consider the reasons for the rise. A planned dip sampling of MASH contacts by the MASH Operational Group will take place in October 2020 and will then be shared with the MASH Strategic Group and the DSPP.

Partnership working

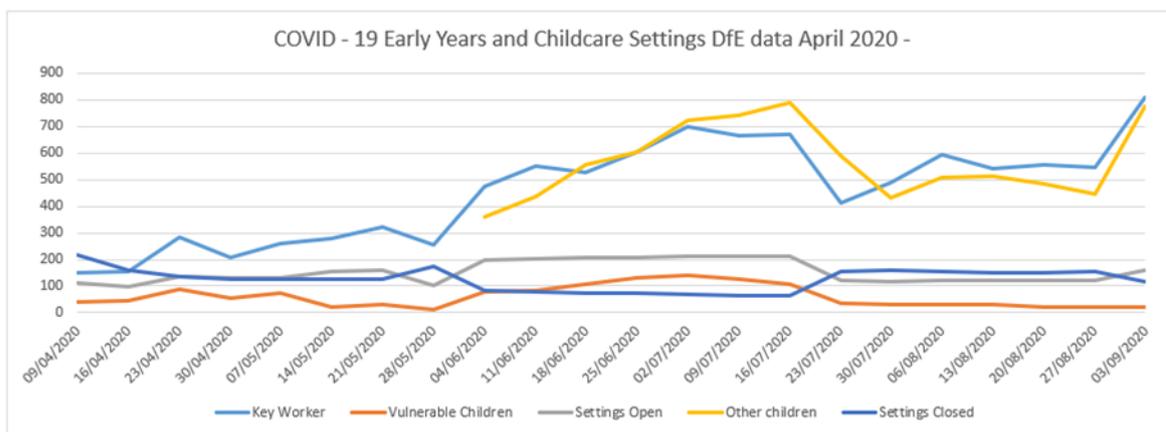
30. There have been some challenges to partnership working due to many agencies not having any face to face contact with families. Whilst Children's Social Care were mostly undertaking work virtually, social workers have felt that they have gone into homes sooner

	and therefore been the main agency for families. Support agencies that would usually be working with families in the community such as Mental Health Services, Youth Services, testing by Drug and Alcohol Services have also been limited. This has led to a lack of support in some areas and some limitations to support services being able share a view about how parents are doing. This concern has been shared with the Dudley Safeguarding People Partnership who are having open dialogue with other support services about their recovery plans and how we can all ensure that children and families begin to receive a wider range of support services again. This has for many of our staff felt imbalanced and unfair.
31.	Child protection investigations continued during this time and continued to be joint with Police when deemed necessary. Children's Social Care Panels that included Partners continued in a virtual format.
32.	We have continued to run Fostering Panel, which has a number of independent members and an Independent Chair. We have followed CoramBaaf (Fostering Advisory Group) guidelines to virtual Panels but have not taken advantage of the Government options to work in a more flexible way around quoracy, choosing instead to continue to operate business as usual.
33.	Children's Social Care have been represented at the weekly Dudley Safeguarding People Partnership Exec video calls, where discussions have taken place throughout the pandemic around the safeguarding of both Children and Adults.
	<u>As we move into the 'new normal'</u>
34.	The challenge now is how to balance the face to face engagement with families across all areas of Children's Social Care and to ensure that social work staff feel that the support for families is shared across the Partnership. We are working across both Social Care and Early Help to ensure that the offer to families is good across all services in a way that meets the expectations to safeguard, support and also adheres to Public Health and Health and Safety advice. Where relevant, vulnerable staff have had risk assessments undertaken in readiness for a return to the workplace. Planning has been in place for some time now to prepare for the opening of more social care buildings. Clearly, decisions made will be in line with Council and Public Health guidance.
35.	We have been working across Children's Services in preparation for an expected surge in referrals, as the school are fully opened to all pupils. Work has been underway to ensure that we have staff in the right place to deal with any increased work.
	<u>Early Help, Early Years and Youth Offending</u>
	<u>Service Delivery During the Covid-19 Pandemic and Next Steps</u>
36.	The following section of the report will describe in turn, service delivery across Early Years, Early Help and Youth Offending with reference to the impact of the pandemic and next steps.

<u>Childcare Strategy Team – Early Years</u>	
37.	The Childcare Strategy Team consisting of 11.5 full time equivalent staff have continued to deliver daily support and challenge to all early years and childcare providers, administer early education funding and provide information to key workers and social care colleagues throughout lockdown from their homes.
38.	Specifically, the team have supported 274 early years and childcare settings of which 84 are day nurseries and pre-schools, 115 are childminders and 84 are school based nursery classes and governor led childcare provision on school sites. The team are currently providing data to the DfE on a weekly basis about the number of providers that remained open, the number of children of key workers attending and the number of vulnerable children supported and meet monthly with Ofsted to raise concerns and receive guidance as Ofsted's eyes and ears on the ground.
39.	The Family Information Service developed a link to our webpages for the use of keyworkers so that they could identify providers open in their locality quickly, should their usual provider be closed. The team supported staff from Russell's Hall Hospital and West Midlands Ambulance Service staff. The team also supported Children's Social Care staff to identify provision for vulnerable children if they were unable to access their usual provider.
40.	Many providers remained open throughout lockdown to provide this valuable support, and from 1 June 2020 more providers reopened. At the end of July most providers closed for the summer break however, nearly all providers reopened at the start of term and many more if not all will reopen this week. See Table 1 below.
41.	There are some significant financial issues that the early years and childcare sector have had to contend with over lockdown in that many lost income from fee paying parents. However, government committed to paying all providers their expected early education funding whether the children attended or not which saw us administer £4,343,055.27 of early education funding for the free entitlements during summer term of this £1,341,912.49 was for 2 year olds accessing the targeted entitlement to 15 hours early learning known as 'Time for Two's' in Dudley.
42.	DfE have now advised that they expect the LA to pay all providers that remain open their full autumn term funding and to ensure this does not fall below last year's autumn headcount we will top up to that level. We are making individual arrangements for providers that opened for the first time in September last year and therefore would not have a useful autumn 2019 headcount, and for those providers who open for the very first time this September. We have also been advised that we will not be required to pay providers who choose to remain closed for any reason other than on Public Health advice.
43.	Take up of early years provision according to the data released in June 2020 from the Early Years Census carried out in January indicated that 76%, which is higher than national take up of 2yr olds and 96% of three and four years olds which, is equal to national take up were accessing their free entitlements. The team are still collating <i>actual</i>



	take up data information from end of summer term but expect this to significantly lower. It will take time for parents to regain their confidence to use childcare services.
44.	Government provided access to a number of business support grants however, the childcare sector was unable to access most of it due to the nature and size of the business and could not furlough all staff as they received public funds for the early years entitlements so had to work out percentages of staff to furlough.
45.	The Childcare Strategy Team have yet to establish how many of our providers have been able to access the Local Authority business support funds including business rate relief and the Local Authority discretionary grant.
46.	Dudley has had three new day nurseries open and six new childminders register during lockdown, who have been supported by their locality childcare support officer. The childcare strategy lead officer has supported Ofsted to 'fast track' these provider applications to ensure there are no sufficiency gaps. At present the team are surveying early years and childcare providers to ask about the impact of Covid-19 on their services and whether they anticipate sustainability issues going forward.
47.	At the present time Dudley has six providers (one pre-school and five childminders) who have informed us they are not reopening their businesses, one provider has closed but transferred children to their other site in Dudley and two have indicated they are likely to close their business at October half term or at the end of term.
48.	Most replies received so far indicate that they have seen much lower take up of their services whilst a few, particularly childminders indicate they are full and are turning parents away.
49.	The last Ofsted information about quality of early years and childcare provision as at December 2019, indicated that 96% of provision is rated good – outstanding.
50.	The Childcare Strategy team is supporting Public Health in Dudley to undertake the test and trace management system for Early Years services. The team also supported the development of a Risk Assessment template for early years and childcare providers. This is coupled with support around the implementation of the first 1001 days principles of the Early Years Transformation Academy implementation.
51.	A childcare bulletin has been issued to all early years and childcare providers including early years staff in schools since February 2020. The bulletin contains all latest government updates in relation to Covid-19, and Public Health and Ofsted information. Also included is information and guidance produced by the childcare strategy team in response to providers requests.
52.	Table 1 - Dudley Early Years and Childcare Settings DfE Data – April 2020 to date



Family Centres – Early Help

53. Family Solutions, Corporate Landlord and Health and Safety have been working extensively throughout the summer to ensure the five Family Centres were ready to open in time for the new school term. Dudley North Family Centre opened on 10th August 2020 followed by Stourbridge Family Centre, Brierley Family Centre, Halesowen Family Centre and finally on 24th August 2020 Dudley Central Family Centre opened.
54. The Family Centres reopened with the hard work and effort of our Family Centre Managers, Corporate Landlords and our Health and Safety colleagues.
55. Due to the Covid-19 building Risk Assessment we have limited staff in each Family Centre. However, Family Centres are open to the public to ensure these important community resources are open and serving the children and families of Dudley. Families are beginning to access the Family Centres in person where there are significant support needs.
56. During the lock down period Early Help services have continued to be delivered with over 400 visits to our most vulnerable families occurring. A sophisticated approach to risk assessing families in the greatest need has been employed throughout the pandemic. This determined who would most benefit from face to face contact with Family Centre based staff. This work continues at a pace. Contacts into Families Centres are approaching levels we would typically expect to see at this time of the year.
57. There is a considerable increase of work into Family Centres that our partners may have picked up in the past but have not been able to as their services have been closed or been reconfigured during the pandemic. As a result, Family Support Services have been at full capacity over the past six months and are now preparing for a spike in referrals as schools and our partners services return.
58. This is particularly evident in the partnership contribution to Early Help Assessments (EHAs) which is currently reduced. At year end 2019 2413 EHAs had been undertaken with a split of 1357 council (**56%**) and 1056 partnership (**44%**).

59. The current position for 2020 at 9 September 2020 is 1557 EHAs have been undertaken with the split of 1045 council (**67%**) and 512 partnership (**33%**). See tables 2 and 3.

60. **Table 2:** Internal (Council) Early Help Assessments:

Title	Family Centre Catchments	2019	2020									Total
		Total	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	
2019 Early Help Assessment	Brierley Hill FC Cluster	214	17	22	11	28	13	35	26	19	3	174
	Dudley Central FC Cluster	328	27	27	31	24	14	31	40	36	2	232
	Dudley North FC Cluster	311	21	35	23	53	27	33	43	28	6	269
	Halesowen FC Cluster	302	32	29	25	45	9	12	12	22	2	188
	Stourbridge FC Cluster	178	15	18	16	32	11	21	20	30	-	163
	Unknown	24	1	1	2	3	6	1	3	2	0	19
	Total	1357	113	132	108	185	80	133	144	137	13	1045

61. **Table 3:** External (Partnership) Early Help Assessments:

2020 External - Early Help Assessment Record	Brierley Hill FC Cluster	170	26	15	13	9	3	3	13	7	-	89
	Dudley Central FC Cluster	340	18	41	92	16	12	12	17	9	-	217
	Dudley North FC Cluster	205	30	5	9	4	8	12	12	5	-	85
	Halesowen FC Cluster	199	14	10	19	11	2	8	3	5	-	72
	Stourbridge FC Cluster	134	5	11	10	5	1	4	7	0	-	43
	Unknown	8	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	-	6
	Total	1056	95	82	143	45	26	40	53	28		512
Total	2413	208	214	251	230	106	173	197	165	13	1557	
	2413	208	214	251	230	106	173	197	165	13	1557	

62. **Table 4 – Health led Early Help Assessments – 2019 Year End and 2020 to date by month;**

Health - Adult Mental Health	4	2		2					2		6
Health - CAMHS	52	7	1	1	3	2		4			18
Health - GP	8						1				1
Health - Health Visitor	52	2	5		3	1	10	8	17		46
Health - Hospital	5	1									1
Health - Maternity	18	4	2					1			7
Health - School Nurse	53		3		1			6	1		11
Health - Specialist Nurse	10					6		3			9
Health - Speech and Language	2										

63. Table 4 indicates the contribution of health partners specifically to the Early Help Assessment highlighting how Speech and Language are yet to contribute this year, the impact on School Health acting as Lead Practitioner and CAMHS EHAs also being underrepresented for example.

64. With the commencement of the Family Centres opening, work has returned to a five-cluster township-based model following on from the North/South 'lockdown' model implemented in the early months of the pandemic.

65.	<p>Finally, Dudley learned in July 2020 that the multi-professional work around Multi-Agency Action Meetings (MAAM) had received a 'commended' status in the highly regarded Municipal Journal (MJ) Awards.</p> <p>A press release was developed to highlight this:</p> <p>https://www.dudley.gov.uk/news/children-s-services-award-commendation/</p>
66.	<p>This is an important recognition of just how far the Early Help system has developed in Dudley since 2016 when it was highlighted by Ofsted through the inspection of Children's Services that 169 EHAs (CAFS at that time) were completed in the six months prior to inspection. As mentioned in this report, 2019 saw 2413 EHAs undertaken enabling significantly greater opportunities to develop preventive support outside of statutory services.</p>
	<p><u>Youth Offending Service</u></p>
67.	<p>Dudley has continued to work throughout the Covid-19 pandemic with minimal interruption. This delivery has been implemented under the guidance by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) detailing how:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police officers will remain in Youth Offending Teams and retain the ability deliver cautions • Appropriate adults being recognised as critical workers • Courts only dealing with <i>urgent</i> work making better use of technology to convene matters • Adjustments being made to support children in the secure estate (longer phone calls, additional phone credit) as visits have been ceased • Management of Covid-19 in the secure estate • Management of Referral Order Panels being held virtually • Transition to Probation on a case by case basis • The Youth Justice Board operating virtually
68.	<p>The Youth Justice Board also issued Local Authorities with details of an early release scheme relating to the secure estate. It remains the case that no Dudley young people have been eligible for this scheme as it did not include the remand cohort, focussing rather on young people at the end of their sentences.</p>
69.	<p>Dudley's Youth Offending Team remains being directly led currently by Mike Galikowski following the secondment of Lead Andrew Griffiths to Contextual Safeguarding.</p>
70.	<p>The team reviews all current case work and allocates a Red/Amber/Green (RAG) rating weekly. This determines which young people <i>must</i> have face to face contact with a professional from the team.</p>

71.	Cases remain being reviewed each week considering vulnerability and/or risk of re-offending. The Youth Offending Service have been supporting the limited court activity, the interface with the Police and the secure estate. Court availability is developing with greater frequency throughout September 2020.
72.	The Youth Offending Service remains active in the fortnightly Multi-Agency Adolescent Risk Management Meeting where concerns around young people are greatest and require a high degree of information sharing across disciplines.
73.	Dudley's Youth Offending Board governance has continued throughout the pandemic with sessions taking place on 17 June and 6 July 2020 with a focus on collaborative work on our 627 work with transitions from year six to seven, national standards and the implementation of the YOS health review. The next board meetings are scheduled for September and 16 December 2020 respectively.
74.	The current picture for the Youth Offending Service is that early intervention and out of court work sees the greatest levels of activity. Given that the courts have only just reopened there is a backlog of work to come through to the team to support. The team continue to deliver remand work by video link. There are challenges with PACE activity as cell blocks are affected by Covid-19 measures. Great care is being applied in how they are used. Furthermore, there are still no professional visits to the secure estate, all contact is being delivered via video or other communication platforms.
75.	Public Health, the Youth Offending Service and CCG are delivering the health elements of the YOS Health review. This features improvement work around speech and language support, improved exit planning into health provision, improved governance arrangements with a Health sub-group of the YOS Board, improved use of data for commissioners, improved links with the Children Looked After Nurse and the implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Hear4Youth partners supporting substance misuse and sexual health.
76.	Finally, pilot work is currently underway with the Violence Reduction Unit with six months of dedicated funding to support a distinct place-based piece of activity. The second of two meetings took place on 23 July 2020 to finalise plans for this pilot with a continued focus on St James ward, schools and partnerships building on the work of the 627 pilot.
	<u>Education</u>
77.	Our schools have worked tirelessly to support children, young people and their families throughout a sustained and very challenging period and, as the data below shows, the attendance of our most vulnerable pupils increased steadily from April to July. One positive to come out of the Covid-19 period has been strengthened working relationships between the local authority and its schools, as well as with the Multi-Academy Trusts.

Month	Average Number of Pupils Attending					Proportion of Specified Cohort Attending				
	All Pupils	Pupils with an EHCP	Pupils with a CiN Plan	Pupils With a CPP	Pupils who are Looked After	All Pupils	Pupils with an EHCP	Pupils with a CiN Plan	Pupils with a Child CPP	Pupils who are Looked After
Pre - Lockdown %	--	--	--	--	--	95%	90%	86%	86%	95%
April *	627	32	18	28	19	1%	2%	7%	13%	8%
May	800	39	31	31	37	2%	2%	12%	14%	15%
June	4726	145	59	69	106	10%	9%	23%	31%	43%
July	6731	195	86	77	137	14%	12%	34%	35%	55%

* Data from the start of the Dudley Schools Attendance Survey which began on the 9th of April 2020

78. For the majority of young people, education has been provided remotely by their school, to enable them to learn at home. Most schools have provided online learning but, where necessary, physical learning packs have been produced for families.
79. To support schools in this work there have been regular conference calls with head teacher representatives from township groups. These calls were initially held on a daily basis at the start of the lockdown period. The frequency of calls reduced over time but are still scheduled on a weekly basis. The collaboration between the LA and this group of heads has shaped much of the support given to schools over the period of time since lockdown. Participants included Education Outcomes Officers, HR colleagues, Public Health colleagues, Health and Safety Officers, representatives from Family Solutions as well as a wide range of head teachers from every type of setting.
80. Accessing free school meals and vouchers became a particular issue for school leaders and support from Catering Managers and Strategic Partnership Service Managers were essential in this effort.
81. Some of the other essential work done by this group included the creation of a unified Risk Assessment shared across all schools that supported wider opening in June. With the help of seconded staff from Ofsted each and every head was spoken to in a 1 to 1 call supporting the implementation of wider opening plans.
82. Dudley, along with other local authorities across England, has been part of the DfE's program to provide devices to support children and young people with remote learning. We received approximately 1100 laptops and devices, the majority of which have been distributed either to children who are looked after (CLA) or children who have significant involvement with a social worker. The remainder have been given out to Year 10

	disadvantaged pupils in local authority schools. Academies have been able to order devices for disadvantaged year 10 pupils directly from the DfE but have been supported by the local authority with the devices for other eligible children.
83.	Anecdotal feedback from schools confirms that these devices have been exceptionally well received by children and families, with some parents having been overwhelmed after receiving something they could never have afforded for their own child(ren).
84.	Local Authority officers were instrumental in supporting schools over the Easter and Whitsun periods in ensuring that as many schools as possible could close whilst maintaining the provision of education for the children of Key Workers by negotiating the placement of individual children at other schools. The basis of this negotiation was a comprehensive model of cluster and hub schools which was prepared early in the lockdown period in order to facilitate an extensive closure of schools should that have become necessary. Thankfully it was not.
85.	Some of the other essential work done by the LA and headteacher group included the creation of a unified Risk Assessment shared across all schools that supported wider opening in June. With the help of seconded staff from Ofsted each and every head was spoken to in a 1 to 1 call supporting the implementation of wider opening plans.
86.	Across the summer, we were co-ordinating and running a wide range of programmes, with the overall aim of supporting our children and young people to return to school in September.
87.	Six primary schools were open, with Howley Grange and Newfield Park running 5 weeks of sport; Hurst Green operating for up to 4 weeks of sport; Jesson's C of E providing a mixture of literacy, numeracy and sport; Milking Bank targeting their vulnerable pupils, and Withymoor running a 4 week sports club.
88.	At the same time, our secondary schools and colleges were supporting young people and adults in Dudley who have been, or will be, affected by COVID-19. In particular, they are focussing on; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year 11 leavers who have not indicated any destination • Young people with SEND • Year 12 students who are wavering with their courses • Year 13 students who would ordinarily be going to HE but are not happy to pay fees to be based at home • Residents currently unemployed • Residents newly unemployed due to Covid-19 and those likely to become unemployed after funding for furloughing staff is stopped
89.	We also worked with the Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust on a project called Eduu.School, which is an online programme to support disadvantaged Year 10 children in local authorities in Birmingham and the Black Country during the period of limited school access. It is free of charge to Dudley Schools and, further to the demonstrations which took

place at the start of July 2020, several mainstream and special schools enrolled their pupils and reports back from Shireland indicate that the site was visited over 1000 times by Dudley students.

Dudley Virtual School also delivered a range of provision, including;

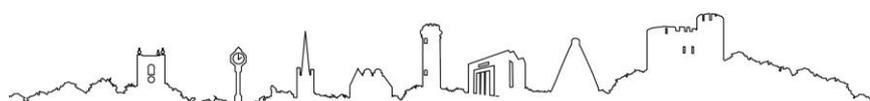
- The Challenge Tuition Programme
- Artslink Awesome Arts Programme
- Literacy & Numeracy Programme - Spy School 2020 - The Lockdown Legend
- Careers – Be Inspired

90. Then, finally this summer, Dudley Performing Arts organised two weeks of events, again targeted at children and young people who are likely to find it difficult to re-engage with school in September.

91. Preparations for the full opening of schools this September has been a key focus and there has been considerable communication in relation to government guidance on reopening including the updating of risk assessments and support from colleagues from Corporate Landlord Services and Health and Safety teams in ensuring schools were fit to open. LA officers have also supported all our schools by providing a letter for distribution to their parents and carers, which highlights our high expectations; namely that all children and young people should return to school; parents and carers should prepare their children for working in bubbles; and that parents and carers should be ready to abide by the new ways of working which our schools will need to implement.

92. A SOP related to the reporting of suspected and confirmed cases of Covid-19 infection has been agreed with schools and Public Health colleges to enable us to track potential spikes in infections and respond quickly should one arise. The latest government guidance in relation to the implementation of local restriction has been interpreted for schools in the following table. Each tier representing an increased degree of restriction as dictated by national Public Health/DfE guidance, should this be necessary.

Tier	Primary schools	Secondary schools and colleges	Special schools and AP
1	<p>Fully open</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High • Face coverings can be worn at Headteachers' discretion 	<p>Fully open</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High • Face coverings can be worn at Headteachers' discretion • Face coverings become mandatory in communal areas if local restrictions are in place 	<p>Fully open</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High • Face coverings can be worn at Headteachers' discretion • Face coverings become mandatory in communal areas for year 7 pupils or older if local restrictions are in place



2	Fully open <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High See above re face coverings 	Operate 2-week rotas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High for pupils and staff on site Key worker and vulnerable pupils attend as normal Other pupils attend on a rota basis. Make welfare calls to pupils not on site See above re face coverings 	Fully open <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High See above re face coverings
3	Fully open <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High See above re face coverings 	Open for key worker and vulnerable pupils, and selected year groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High for pupils and staff on site Make welfare calls to pupils not on site See above re face coverings 	Fully open <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High See above re face coverings
4	Open for key worker and vulnerable pupils <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High for pupils and staff on site Make welfare calls to pupils not on site See above re face coverings 	Open for key worker and vulnerable pupils <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High for pupils and staff on site Make welfare calls to pupils not on site See above re face coverings 	Fully open <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use SOP and send Schools Covid Update to Janice High See above re face coverings

It is sincerely hoped that this will not be necessary, but we are prepared.

93. With the opening of school this week it is possible to see the impact of all this work. There were concerns that parents and pupils may have been reluctant to return but we can report that the efforts put in by schools, supported by LA staff have been successful and at the end of the first week of term the indicative attendance figures would suggest that:-

- 94.9% of pupils attended in Primary settings
- 95.1% of pupils attended in Secondary settings
- 87.0% of pupils attended in Special school settings
- Overall attendance of 92.3% across all settings

94. Our ongoing work now is to work with schools in helping pupils to make up the lost learning that has occurred since lockdown, to ensure that teaching is always at least good or better and to respond to any emerging Covid outbreaks or restrictions in a way that minimises the impact of learning and progress.

	<u>SEND</u>
95.	Following the SEND Inspection in May 2019, Dudley became subject to a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) agreed in November 2019.
96.	Alongside the WSoA has been the development of the SEND Team Improvement Plan. There were 39 activities identified of which there are only 4 on track left to complete by end of September 2020. All of those activities have been progressed during Covid-19.
97.	At the same time as the SEND Service embarked on its restructure journey, Covid-19 took effect and the SEND service had to develop within this context. The report demonstrates the progress of SEND with the investment provided.
98.	<p>During the Pandemic, the Government initiated the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 which took effect on 1st May 2020. The tenet of this Regulation was as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Secretary of State’s Notice converting the SEN duty to a ‘reasonable endeavours’ duty</i> • <i>The new Regulations altering SEN timescales</i> • <i>The meaning and effect of a “reasonable endeavours” duty</i> • <i>Implications of changes for both assessment and drafting of Plans</i> • <i>FTT appeals under the current regime</i>
99.	What this meant in effect was that the SEND Service could make Covid Exceptions on cases where they could not complete the Assessment or Issue an EHC Plan due to reasonable endeavours as they were unable to obtain the relevant advices to determine support required. 65 Covid Exception letters were sent to families informing them of delay.
100.	From the 25 th September 2020, the regulations are expected to cease, and the SEND Service will be expected to resume meeting its absolute SEN duty in all aspects of its work. Those 65 cases are being worked on now so that there are no Covid Exceptions cases after the 25 th September in line with the statutory obligations.
	<u>SEND Staffing- Recruitment</u>
101.	During Covid-19, the SEND Service has continued its recruitment process.
102.	To provide a consistent SEND Service, agency staff were employed to manage the caseloads as an interim measure.
103.	Those permanent staff that had been interviewed in February 2020, were able to join the SEND service through the month of April. This included Case Officers and the Compliance and Tribunal Officer. The Local Offer and Participation Officer started also in early June.

104.	Further recruitment for the remaining permanent Case Officer posts was concluded in June 2020 and this resulted in the last 6 posts being filled. 4 of those Case Officers have started during August and the beginning of September. The last 2, work in education and have to give a term's notice and we are looking forward to them starting at the beginning of January 2021.
105.	The Senior post was interviewed for on the 26 th August but unfortunately, not recruited to. This post has gone back out to be re-advertised. An agency Senior remains covering this post.
106.	Lastly the SEND Advanced Practitioner Post is currently being advertised and interviews are earmarked for end of September 2020.
	<u>Staffing – Restructure</u>
107.	The SEND Service has restructured into North (North and Central) and South (Stourbridge, Halesowen and Brierley Hill) to manage the five Township areas.
108.	Case work has been allocated along the lines of North and South.
109.	In addition, during Covid-19, the SEN Admin Team became the SEND Business Support Team from the 1 st April 2020.
	<u>Policies and Procedures</u>
110.	Review of the current policies and procedures have been undertaken during Covid-19 to ensure the policies and procedures are fit for purpose. Where they have needed to be revised and or amended, that has happened. Similarly, as a result of the suite of processes coming into existence, the SEND handbook has been completed in Mid - August. Given that there are over 100 entries within the SEND handbook, certain sections of the handbook is being shared with SEND Service at the weekly Team briefing on aspects that the Case officers must know in order that can do their jobs in an effective and compliant way.
	<u>SEND Complaints, Tribunals and compliments</u>
111.	With having a dedicated resource for Tribunal management through the appointment of the Compliance and Tribunal Officer, we have benefitted from this investment already. SEND have been successful in 2 cases being found in the LA's favour during Covid-19, but more importantly developing the working relationship with families through this process. In addition, we have been able to vacate Tribunals and agree to Consent Orders without costly tribunals by having this dedicated worker managing tribunal cases during Covid-19.
112.	There have been 36 cases lodged at Tribunal since 1 st March 2020 of which 21 are still on-going. There have been 4 positive feedback (compliments) about the work of the Compliance and Tribunal Officer in supporting families in the tribunal process.

113.	In terms of complaints there has been 10 during the first quarter (1 st April to 30 June). 7 have been completed on time, 2 have been 1 day late and 1 has been 2 working days late. In the main, the feedback from the complaints service is that the SEND responses are detailed and clear re the justification of the decisions or the elements of the complaint.
114.	With regards to compliments in the same quarter (April to June), aside from the 4 tribunal compliments, SEND has received 34 compliments during Covid-19.
	<u>Induction and Training</u>
115.	Covid-19 has necessitated a new way to induct permanent staff and enable them to learn all the processes and ways of working without being with their peers in the same environment. It has been challenging.
116.	The SEND Quality Assurance Consultant Lead (Advanced Practitioner role) developed the Induction and Training Programme to be delivered virtually to staff. It is a modular type approach where the new staff undertake learning activities and meet with the Quality Assurance Lead to feedback in order to move on to next pieces of work. Following the April staff feedback, this virtual programme was amended for the August staff inductees.
117.	During Covid-19, this remains a difficult area to manage as effectively as the SEND Management Team recognised adult learning often requires being in the company with other adults to share and much of the learning is solo learning as there is very little opportunity to learn through osmosis as staff are working from home so no incidental learning occurs.
	<u>Quality of EHCP</u>
118.	Just before Covid-19, the 'Good Plan Day' event took place on the 28 th February 2020, but all the development work has continued throughout Covid. The EHCP format has been revised and the SEND QA Lead has been meeting various groups to share, amend and revise the format. The new EHCP format is ready to be launched and it is anticipated that it will be used from the September onwards.
119.	To support addressing the quality of the contents within the EHCP, the Multi-agency EHCP Audit took place during Covid-19 on the 17 th July attended by 22 participants across Education, Health and Social Care and a parent rep. The report of the findings from this first Multi-agency will be distributed at the end of September 2020. Dates for the Multi-agency termly Audits have been agreed for the year. The Internal SEND monthly audit cycle is being developed to sustain improving the EHCP's going forward.
	<u>Multi-agency Partnership working</u>
120.	Throughout Covid-19, a range of working groups have developed and continued its operation to improve the quality of the SEND system and look to improve the outcomes for Dudley SEND children, young people and young adults. The working groups include

	<p>the PfA Operations and Provision Task and finish group, the Developing Health Pathway Group have been in existence from the beginning of Covid-19 and the Developing Social Care Pathway Group will have its first meeting in September 2020. The Participation Group has been set up to discuss how to engage young people and the Multi-agency Communication and Culture group met in July and is now ensuring the communication platforms across the LA, Health and CVS are aligned, avoiding duplication and providing synergy.</p>
121.	<p>In addition, link meetings with the Virtual School have occurred during the Covid-19 to ensure the support for Children Looked After are prioritised in terms of timely provision. Continued focus with the Children Missing Education team (CME) has strengthened the relationship and focused seeking the right settings for children so that they receive some form of education. Further partnership working with the Learning Support Service (LSS) has seen the multi-agency SEND Tool Kit being improved for Dudley Schools, SENCO's and Heads to apply in enhancing the 'Graduated Response' in the identification of SEN children and young people.</p>
122.	<p>As the Autumn term begins, further multi- agency groups will be formed to ensure the SEND agenda becomes everyone's business despite Covid-19 restrictions.</p>
	<p><u>Work with families</u></p>
123.	<p>During Covid-19, work with families continued as they were able to access the SEND Team and / or their case workers to seek clarification and / or support with SEND matters. Although some of the EHCP's could not be completed, and became subject to Covid-19 exceptions, letters were sent to families to explain the delay and what the intention would be.</p>
124.	<p>Where EHCP's could be finalised, these were done so that families knew where their child would be going for September.</p>
125.	<p>Letters were sent to those families during the Covid-19 period (summer) where a school place had not yet been identified letting the parent know what we intended to do in terms of seeking a placement for the September start. Several placements have been found and we are working with providers regarding the remaining others.</p>
126.	<p>SEND supported settings around the risk assessments of children with EHCP's back into school and have alerted other colleagues where there have been concerns for not receiving additional support.</p>
127.	<p>Through the SEND Bulletin, we have kept families informed on the SEND Service progress.</p>

Finance

128. Central Government have made numerous funding streams available to support local authorities during the Coronavirus outbreak, including financial assistance to Dudley MBC.
129. The latest assumption is that Children's Services will benefit from approximately £1.9m of Dudley's Covid funding which will support the extensions of placements for children in care and to cover the loss of traded services income during the lockdown period, including school led community activities.

Law

130. The bills and legislation covering childcare and early education are: The Childcare Act 2006, as amended by The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 and The Children and Families Act 2014. Local Authority (Duty to Secure Early Years Provision Free of Charge) Regulations 2012.
131. The Council is mandated to commission Health Visitor services through its Public Health Grant.
132. Youth Offending Teams are statutory multi-agency service required by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
133. The Youth Justice Board are required to monitor the effectiveness of the Youth Justice system as set out in Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
134. HM Chief Inspector of Probation's responsibilities are set out in Section 7 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, as amended by the Offender Management Act 2007, section 12(3)(a). This requires the chief inspector to inspect (section 1) and report to the Secretary of State (section 3) on the arrangements for the provision of probation services.
135. Under Section 7(6) of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, HM Chief Inspector of Probation is also conferred to inspect and report on Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), established under section 39 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and bodies acting on their behalf.

Equality Impact

136. The report identifies areas of inequality and there is recognition that any work undertaken in this area will attempt to reduce inequalities in the health and wellbeing of children, young people, their parents and carers. If required, an equality impact assessment will be undertaken on any specific area of Early Years, Early Help or Youth Offending activity.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

137. There are no Human Resource / Organisational Development implications arising from the contents of this report.

Commercial/Procurement

138. There are no procurement issues arising from this report.

The support to our school colleagues through this challenging time has helped to continue to build relationships which should have a positive impact on retention and increase of school business.

Health, Wellbeing and Safety

139. The information provided in this scrutiny report has improved the health, wellbeing and safety of children, young people, families and communities at the centre of its implementation.



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