

# **Children's Services response to Covid-19:** **Family Services**

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This paper provides a brief overview of the key changes made to the Family Services operating model in response to Covid-19 in response to challenges within our community, and how we will implement this learning going forward.

## **Initial Challenges under Covid-19**

Children's services statutory duties require the delivery of a casework service model, which involves a high level of visits by social workers to residents' homes. We work directly with children and families to address safeguarding concerns related to emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect, and these children will become either subject to a child in need plan or child protection plan.

The statutory framework requires that we site a child in their home setting to complete a check on their welfare. We are also required to convene a number of multi-agency partnership meetings, with key agencies, such as health, schools and police to ensure that children are sighted and are being seen by key professionals in addition to the child's social worker. In addition to children living in the community, we are also required to provide a statutory service to children in care and to care leavers

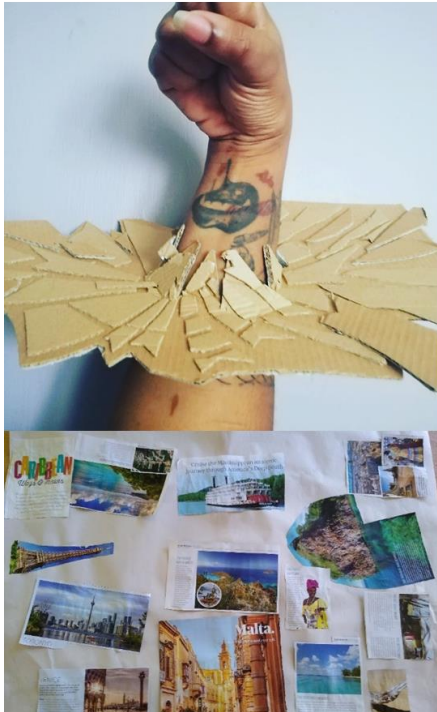
Lockdown from 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, resulted in government direction to stay at home. Although we had been planning for a lockdown, this presented us with the need to implement an immediate new structure for service delivery. It meant that we were no longer able to visit children at home or in their placements and as children were not attending school or health appointments, we did not have other professionals looking out for their welfare. The other consequence was that because families were ordered to stay indoors, our referral rates for new cases dropped significantly, and we were extremely concerned that abuse may be going undetected.

Lockdown also had considerable impact on our staffing capacity. As staff were directed not to travel, we had to quickly move to a virtual service, and agree minimal staffing levels to respond to emergencies.

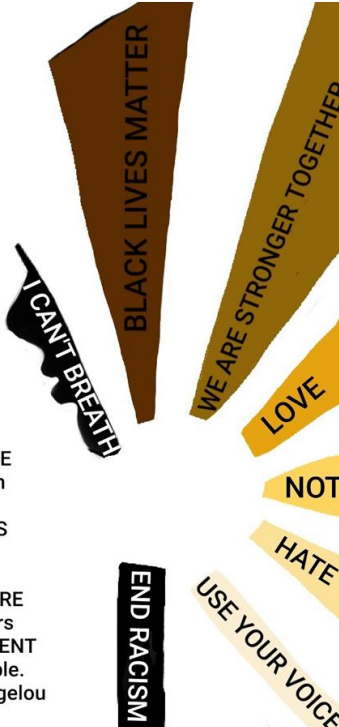
## **Family Services Response**

- We made an early decision that there would be some children who we would need to continue to see for safeguarding reasons.
- We established the staffing levels required to provide an emergency response.
- Staff were provided with PPE to travel to H&F to see families in their homes and to cover the duty system.
- We set up regular teams/WhatsApp meetings to ensure staff had robust management supported while working virtually.

- The council provided free car parking for keyworkers
- We assessed the level of risk to all 1300 children open to social care by RAG rating cases. This list included working out which children were accessing education
- We set up virtual home visiting for all children and their families and provided digital equipment to some families to facilitate virtual visiting.
- We developed a new virtual model for all virtual meetings including, Child Protection Conferences and LAC reviews. Our model has been highly regarded and used as an exemplar by DfE
- We made a decision not to make non-emergency placement moves of children in care and care leavers who were ready for a placement step down, to ensure we maximised their stability and support during lockdown.
- We provided additional support to young people known to YOS who were subject to community orders.
- We extended the approvals for foster carers to increase foster carer availability.
- We provided PPE to all our foster carers.
- We developed a weekly creative challenge for children in care to encourage them to take part in a writing /art project with fantastic results.



PREJUDICE  
is a burden  
that  
CONFUSES  
the past,  
threatens  
THE FUTURE  
and renders  
THE PRESENT  
inaccessible.  
- Maya Angelou



## **Future Challenges**

- Ensuring that we meet our statutory responsibilities while we continue to support staff to work in line with health and safety requirements.
- Development of a new operational delivery of a part virtual, part office-based service.
- Providing reduced office space, but sufficient to allow people to feel part of a team & have the opportunity to have support & learning from colleagues
- Potential for increased activity rates as more services return to pre Covid working arrangements.
- Additional cost pressures for the Local Authority if we seek a significant increase in the number of children requiring care.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Looked After Children and Care Leavers: Engagement with Young People during Covid-19

*This briefing has been prepared to provide an overview of the statutory service provided to our Children Looked After and Care Leavers during Covid 19 pandemic.*