

Children's Services response to Covid-19: **Children's Commissioning**

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This paper provides an overview of the activity undertaken by the H&F Children's Services Commissioning Team to ensure Children and Families have continued to receive services from the introduction of lockdown through to the present. The paper also provides detail on how services can be delivered under a new operating model in future.

Initial Challenges under Covid-19

Some of the initial challenges experienced following the introduction of lockdown included the need to quickly adapt to a remote working environment, key priorities across the department included:

- Ensuring our children and their families are kept safe during the Covid-19 outbreak
- Ensuring continued delivery of frontline commissioned services
- Working in partnership with providers to adapt and extend their delivery model to support the council's emergency response.

Commissioning Response

Children's Commissioning prioritised efforts to ensure all front-line services were well supported. This included working with our commissioned providers in order to secure and redeploy staff as needed and to ensure coordinated effort and join up. Headlines achieved throughout the last few months include:

- Leading the Council's response to food security for all residents including supporting the foodbank
- Re-design and redeployment of commissioned provision to ensure ongoing provision available to support vulnerable children and families
- Lead the logistical PPE arrangements to ensure distribution and security of supply for frontline CHS provision including schools and residential home providers
- Leading the development of a CHS recovery plan ensuring lessons learned and innovation from our Covid response is built into future service design and delivery

Food Security

It became evident early on that ensuring that vulnerable families had continued access to food supplies was essential, and that the pandemic was going to mean that there were more families who would need to rely on emergency food supplies. We very quickly mobilised a team and developed an approach to scaling up and supporting the H&F Foodbank. We took an active role in leading the development of a corporate food response, and lead on the move of the food bank to Olympia. A

summary of some of our initiatives to support the food strategy and ensure business continuity of core services where we have a statutory duty are listed below:

- Secured interim voucher scheme ahead of central government scheme to ensure children whose school had already or were about to close continued to have be supported
- Provision of school meals for vulnerable children and those of key workers where schools remain open during the school term
- Securing Breakfast packages for primary schools that could be delivered to homes during lockdown
- Provision of school meals for vulnerable children and those of key workers (holidays)
- Provider's in place to supply additional meal volumes for Adult Social Care if needed
- Scale up the food bank to meet the needs to the increased number of vulnerable families requiring food support.
- Providing transport to allow the Foodbank to operate a delivery only model, safely delivering food packages to people's homes.

Travel care

The Travel Care Team have been a key part of H&F's Children's response. We worked with providers to redeploy the taxi and mini-buses across services to ensure transport solutions were in place and deliveries of essential goods of PPE, IT and food were received by our vulnerable residents, key workers and staff, whilst also ensuring regular services for children still attending schools continued.

What we've done:

- Undertaking business as usual work for vulnerable students and children of key workers still attending school throughout the pandemic
- Providing transport for the Haven, Stephen Wiltshire Centre and Play Association Schemes.
- Completing over 100 deliveries per day of food parcels from the Foodbank
- Delivering PPE, Completing IT collections and deliveries for Digital Services
- Redeployment of transport staff to support Adult Meals on Wheels provision
- Redeployment of H&F staff to support the foodbank operations on site.

Children's Commissioning have worked closely with senior management and frontline social work teams to ensure placement provision has remained stable and providers supported throughout lockdown, this includes contacting all. Key strategic partnerships have been strengthened on both a Pan London and sub-regional basis to understand and feed into wider placements pressures, both now and those anticipated over the coming months.

Placements and Social Care Services

Children's Commissioning have worked closely with senior management and frontline social work teams to ensure placement provision has remained stable and providers supported throughout lockdown, this includes contacting all commissioned fostering agencies, residential children's homes and our semi-independent living providers. Business continuity plans were collated and refreshed for internal operational services. Key strategic partnerships have been strengthened on both a Pan London and sub-regional basis to understand and feed into wider placements pressures, both now and those anticipated over the coming months. Key actions include:

- Maintaining placement stability through frequent communication across the provider network
- Adapted quickly to frequently changing national guidance
- Coordination and distribution of starter PPE packs to all placement providers
- Streamlined situational reporting in line with regional guidance to reduce demand on providers
- Introducing parking exemptions for provider staff needing to drive into H&F
- Worked with providers to place some settings in lockdown for the safety of young people and staff, providing food deliveries and re-purposing some settings into isolation units where young people or staff have had symptoms
- Coordination of family group conferences virtually
- Continued the commissioning of virtually family parenting assessments.
- Funding extra support, education and craft sessions in some settings

SEND

With Schools and other settings initially closed, but children and young people with SEND and their families still very much requiring support, it was vital that we provided timely and effective solutions via the SEND service and our external providers. We have worked closely with all SEND and CAMHS services to maintain staffing capacity, actively monitor adversely affected cohorts, prioritise and manage referrals, implement effective digital solutions and balance business as usual with adherence to social distancing.

What we've done:

- Telehealth assessments for new EHCNAs and Speech and language therapy for all children with a final EHCP
- Telephone support line for parents Children's Integrated Complex Care and SLT admin hub.
- Transition Annual reviews reports prioritised with the SLT joining meetings by phone where possible
- IASS Service continued

- KIDS – remote statutory mediation and advice
- Short breaks support has continued
- CAMHS – RAG-rating and cross-referencing cases to identify emerging need e.g. with H&F's Looked After Children Team; swiftly implementing socially distanced modalities that maintain service capacity; and expanding and promoting digital technologies like Kooth to help reach at-risk children and young people.
- Speech and Language learning workshops for parents to be delivered via video
- 'How to' guides for parents/carers: range of written guides, voice over power points and videos Direct telehealth Speech and Language Therapy 1-1 input
- Support to parents via CLCH Children's Integrated Complex Care and SLT admin hub.
- Telehealth review sessions for children in Early years settings with or without an EHCP transitioning in September.

Early Help

By redeploying some of our providers we were able to work with schools to very quickly start to deliver a safe provision for the children of our key workers and our vulnerable children. The positive feedback received from parents and children has led to the extension of this offer from pre-Easter holidays through to September. We worked with our early help providers to ensure we continued to support out vulnerable children and families at the earliest point, preventing escalation. We expanded our early help offer to proactively target our shielded families to ensure they get the support they need, working closing with the H&F CAN team and the foodbank.

What we've done:

- Early Help case management has continued virtually
- Mentoring and 1:1 support has continued, expanding to support care leavers
- Holiday provision continued but repurposed for vulnerable and key worker children
- Youth provision and children's centre provision delivered virtually.
- New EH helpline to support parents with shield list follow up for extra/early support
- Holiday provision extended to support schools delivering childcare
- Transition camps to mitigate against attainment gaps
- Detached outreach project to target at risk young people.

PPE Support

Officers mobilised a PPE distribution programme across Children's Services supporting all schools, early years providers, social care settings and commissioned providers in accessing resources. To date we have delivered over 60,000 pieces of PPE across Children's Services and continue to support settings in accessing supply chains and distribution networks.

Future Challenges

- We anticipate seeing an increase in the number of vulnerable families as a result of COVID. This may place an increased pressure on our early help and statutory services, and we need to plan on how we respond to this in light of the financial pressure on Children's services and the council as a whole.

Impact on Future Delivery Design

- All future programmes will be reviewed through the COVID lens to ensure all lessons learned are accommodated.
- This means moving to delivery models that prioritise high impact services, leverage digital technology, and promote cross-sector, client-focused partnerships.