



CABINET - INFORMATION REPORT

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| Date Written | April 2020 |
| Report Author | Annabel Lloyd |
| Service Area | Children's Services |
| Exempt/Non Exempt | Non Exempt |
| Committee Date | |

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Children's Services: COVID-19

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides information to Cabinet about the adjustments required by Children's Services under the 'Stay At Home Rules'. The report also provides an update in relation to emerging information about the impact of the Stay At Home Rules. The report supplements the briefings and responses to Cabinet Member's questions.

2.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On 23rd March 2020 the Prime Minister and First Minister made announcements outlining the Stay At Home Rules which increased the emphasis on working from home and social distancing in a bid to stop the spread of coronavirus.
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>)
- 2.2 The virus has not altered our duties to vulnerable children, although Children's Services have been required to make a range of adjustments in line with Stay At Home Rules. Managers and staff have worked closely together to look at ways in which we can ensure we discharge our duties to the public, whilst promoting both public and staff safety.

3.0 CHILDRENS SERVICES OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS UNDER THE STAY AT HOME RULES

3.1 Table 1 below provides a summary of our continuing services to the public:

Table 1

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Early Help Hub | Business as usual - operating by phone, video call and IT. Staff will be operating a mixed system of working from home and being office based to ensure essential duties are covered. |
| Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub | Business as usual - staff will be operating a mixed system of working and being home based to ensure essential duties are covered. |
| Intake | Cases have been assessed and RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rated. A duty system is in operation with other staff working from home. Work is being carried out by telephone and video call. Visits in line with Telephone Triage 1 Minute Guide which outlines the assessment process to inform decision about whether PPE should be used. |
| Supporting Change | <p>Manager and consultant social worker are coordinating essential work with families wherever possible. Work is being carried out by telephone and video call with visits in line with Telephone Triage 1 Minute Guide.</p> <p>Number of the staff group are working across the service to cover business.</p> <p>Contact is in line with the Interim 1 Minute Guide.</p> |
| Children With Disabilities Team | Cases have been assessed and RAG rated. A duty system is in operation with other staff working from home. Work is being carried out by telephone and video call. Visits in line with Telephone Triage 1 Minute Guide. |
| Child and Family Support Team | Cases have been assessed and RAG rated. A duty system is in operation with other staff working from home. Work is being carried out by telephone and video call with visits in line with Telephone Triage 1 Minute Guide. |
| Children Looked After Team | Cases have been assessed and RAG rated. A duty system is in operation with other staff working from home. Work is being carried out by telephone and video call with visits in line with Telephone Triage 1 Minute Guide. |
| Fostering | A duty system is in operation with other staff working from home. Work is being carried out by telephone and video call. Staff prioritising support to foster carers and placement searches. |
| Care Leaver's PA Service | Cases have been assessed RAG rated. A duty system is in operation with other staff working from home. Work is being carried out by telephone and video call with visits in line with Telephone Triage 1 Minute Guide. |

3.2 When the Stay At Home Rules were announced, children’s services management team (CSMT) developed the following in response to Corporate direction and in pursuit of maintaining essential statutory services:

- CSMT daily dial in to note new information about staff capacity in the service, agree, prioritise, manage risks and share information.
- Held staff briefings prior to 23.3.20 to support, inform and involve staff.
- Consultation with foster carers.
- Develop 1-minute Guides for staff in relation to:
 - Telephone Triage and PPE
 - CP Conferences and Core Group Meetings
 - Keeping in touch with CLA and Contact
 - Working from Home
- Contribute to Silver and Bronze command to coordinate work with partners in relation to safeguarding children.
- Develop and distribute resource packs for CLA, foster carers and families with care and support plans.
- Develop a process for providing urgent support to families where a parent requires in-patient treatment.
- Maintained Resource Panel on a weekly basis to ensure families and staff can access the resources required to support families.
- RAG rated cases and dip samples at week 4 to provide independent assurance that children and families are being seen appropriately.
- CMT agreed the Outline Business Case for additional resources including social worker, support workers and foster care placements for cases where a parent or parents are in hospital.

3.3 Work is under way to assess compliance and coordinate any resulting work linked to the Welsh Government <https://gov.wales/childrens-social-services-during-covid-19-pandemic-guidance>

4.0 COVID-19 IMPACT

4.1 The emerging information is revealing the following risks and issues which are summarised in Table 2 alongside the service’s response. It will take some considerable time to recover in full from the impact of this period, and whilst it is impossible to full quantify it, we are mindful about the possible long term impact of extremely low take up of early help services.

Table 2

| Number | Risk Description | Action |
|--------|---|--|
| 1. | a) Rate of referral has dropped well below usual levels giving rise to concern about harm to children going unreported. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather data to quantify and analyse. • Raise with partners via safeguarding silver command in the context of the duty to report under s.7 of the Social Services and Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014. |

| | | |
|----|---|--|
| | <p>b) Changes to partners' operational business, especially in terms of schools, midwifery and health visiting mean that children at risk are being seen much less often in or out of the home.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the communications work aimed at ensuring public and partners know that we are business as usual for safeguarding and encouraging families to take up early help and support services. • Continue our work with families, ensuring those most vulnerable children are seen and that we respond to increasing or new concerns. • Develop service resilience and recovery plan to ensure that the service can respond to increased demand and lag impact of business when Stay At Home Rule is altered or terminated. |
| 2. | <p>Numbers of CLA have increased to 213 as at 21/04/20. The rate of becoming looked after has remained below the 2018-19 level but there has been a lag impact on exits from the looked after service due to the impact of the Stay At Home Rules on Court work and interventions aimed at safely expediting exits from the children looked after system.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain critical quality assurance process in reviewing case by case to ensure there are no missed opportunities to progress exits from the looked after system. • Develop service resilience and recovery plan to ensure that the service can pick up the pace of business to safely expedite exits for the looked after system when Stay At Home Rule is altered or terminated. |

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Children's Services have worked with the Service Accountant and have quantified the projected financial impact of this period as being £185k. The projection is indicative only given the uncertainty about the full impact of the surge

6.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Staff have been recognised for working well together, being also available during the evenings and at weekends and prioritising their response to those who are most at risk, using PPE if necessary. Some staff are naturally anxious about the implications of the virus and information and support has been provided on a case by case basis.

7.0 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1

| | Positive Impacts | Negative Impacts | Not Applicable |
|---|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1. Merthyr Tydfil Well-being Objectives | 0 of 4 | 0 of 4 | 4 of 4 |
| 2. Sustainable Development Principles - How have you considered the five ways of working: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term • Prevention • Integration • Collaboration • Involvement | 0 of 5 | 0 of 5 | 5 of 5 |
| 3. Protected Characteristics <i>(including Welsh Language)</i> | 0 of 10 | 0 of 10 | 10 of 10 |
| 4. Biodiversity | 0 of 1 | 0 of 1 | 1 of 1 |

Summary:

This is an information report. The impact of COVID-19 will require an IAA in the fullness of time.

The report outlines the operational adjustments in response to the Stay At Home Rules. Whilst negative impacts are anticipated and emerging, it is too soon to assess the likely impact of this.

LISA CURTIS JONES
CHIEF OFFICER (SOCIAL SERVICES)

COUNCILLOR CHRIS DAVIES
CABINET MEMBER FOR
SOCIAL SERVICES

| BACKGROUND PAPERS | | |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Report Title | Document(s) Date | Document Location |
| | | |
| Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution? | | No |

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.