

Children and Families Service
Update for Scrutiny - 15th June 2020
Update on key performance trends following Covid-19

Introduction

The Children and Families Service has continued to provide critical services to children and families during the Covid-19 situation.

Following the Government guidance and in line with Council policies, by 26th March 2020, the Children and Families Service had closed the Youth Hubs, the Contact Centre, 275 Mare Street (the Youth Justice Service building) and moved to the majority of services being provided virtually, through telephone or video technology or online.

Whilst the majority of our casework contact with children and young people in Children's Social Care moved to being undertaken virtually, staff have continued to make face to face visits to the children and families that we are most concerned about. At a very early stage, all open cases were reviewed by practitioners and risk rated in the context of Covid-19. These risk assessments are regularly reviewed to inform decisions about the level and type of contact that we are having with each child and young person that we are working with. As lockdown measures are easing the service has increased the number of direct visits being undertaken and will continue to review each individual case to identify those children that need to be visited as a priority and to define the frequency of visiting. Staff are making risk assessments in relation to health and safety considerations for the family and for staff prior to each visit they take and PPE equipment is available to all staff and being used in line with public health guidance.

Most of the Young Hackney universal provision for young people has moved to being delivered online with young people able to access a range of information and activities, including video sessions created by workers through the website. The Detached Outreach Team in Young Hackney has continued to be deployed and has recently increased the number of sessions that are provided to six per week. This small team of youth workers, supported by a clinician, are able to engage with young people in outdoor areas in the community.

The Youth Offending Teams have kept in very regular contact with the young people that they are supporting and have undertaken face to face visits where necessary. All urgent Court work is being managed virtually and there are an increasing number of cases that will not be heard until the courts are able to open up again.

Key trends from 23rd March 2020 onwards

- *Decrease in Referrals (including Child Protection Referrals)*

There has been a significant decrease in the number of referrals received since social distancing measures were introduced, including the closure of schools.

The service received an average of 50 referrals per week in the months of April and May. These weekly averages are 46% lower than the normal weekly average of 92 referrals prior to lockdown (based on April 2019 - February 2020 data).

The service started an average of 15 Section 47 (Child Protection) enquiries per week during the months of April and May, which is 48% lower than the weekly average of 29 Section 47 enquiries started prior to lockdown (based on April 2019 - February 2020 data).

- *Response to decrease in referrals*

Referrals from schools make up a considerable proportion of the referrals received by the Children and Families Service. With schools closed, there has been a decrease in referrals received from them, and as schools reopen, a corresponding increase is expected.

Hackney have [promoted the Children and Families Service resources and how to make referrals in Hackney Life](#). This is sent to every household in Hackney. Data on the decrease in referral numbers has also been shared with strategic partners in the multi-agency network to raise awareness. Guidance has been issued and awareness raising activities have taken place with those operating the council's helpline to support them in identifying potential safeguarding issues and domestic abuse concerns so that they are able to refer these on. The NSPCC has received funding from the government to run campaigns and expand their helpline. Any referrals received by the NSPCC in relation to Hackney children are passed directly to the local authority.

The First Access and Screening Team (FAST) has been working closely with colleagues from the Hackney Learning Trust to ensure additional advice and support is available to schools where they have struggled to make contact with families (who are not already open to CFS) and where they are worried about the children's welfare in the context of the lockdown.

An early help hub, staffed by Young Hackney workers, integrated into FAST has been supporting the Council's Coronavirus helpline by making first contact with families with children who have contacted the council requesting support related to Covid 19 (non-safeguarding issues), to explore their support needs and, where appropriate, link them into early help or community services.

Other key trends

As at 29th May 2020, there were 256 children on a Child Protection Plan - this is a slight decrease compared to the number before the Covid-19 situation (258 children on Child Protection Plans in the first week of March 2020).

As at 29th May 2020, there were 426 looked after children - this is a slight decrease compared to the number of looked after children before the Covid-19 situation (431 looked after children in the first week of March 2020).

- *Domestic abuse referrals to DAIS*

The number of referrals to DAIS has generally increased week on week following the lockdown (23rd March 2020), although there was a dip in numbers for two weeks in May, rising again at the end of May. DAIS usually averages 25 referrals per week, with this peaking at 40 referrals for the weeks ending 1st May 2020 and 22nd May 2020 - a 60% increase on the normal level of referrals in these weeks. The average increase on the weekly referral level since the beginning of April is approximately 35%. The increase is primarily coming from self-referrals with people emailing the DAIS inbox asking for support for themselves. A significant number of those that are self-referring are victims/survivors who have used DAIS before and are getting in touch as they have renewed concerns during the lockdown. Referrals are also being received from people raising concerns regarding neighbours. The Duty telephone line has been very busy.

Week ending 6th March	Week ending 13th March	Week ending 20th March	Week ending 27th March	Week ending 3rd April	Week ending 10th April	Week ending 17th April	Week ending 24th April	Week ending 1st May	Week ending 8th May	Week ending 15th May	Week ending 22 May
23	21	13	22	31	32	38	38	40	31	27	40

Recovery plan

As lockdown restrictions are eased by the Government, Hackney Children and Families Service have been updating their guidance to practitioners around visits to children and families to ensure that this is safe for staff and service users. Safeguards are already in place across the Council to ensure that those staff who do need to go to Council buildings are able to do so safely.

Senior managers are monitoring data on key performance indicators on a weekly basis.

As an essential service most aspects of service delivery have continued, but delivery has taken place in different ways. We are seeing the current circumstances as an opportunity to transform services for the greater benefit of children and families (our service users), staff,

the wider council and other stakeholders. This is driving our approach of considering this period as an opportunity for transformative change.

In May, we held two informative workshops with CFS staff, to get their views on what the next steps for the service should be. We will continue working with managers, staff and service users to shape the future of CFS.

Plans are currently being developed for Young Hackney's summer provision for young people.

A strategic workstream on *Adapting Support and Services for Children and Young People* chaired by the Group Director, Children, Adults and Community Health, has been established and will be focusing on three key areas: keeping children and young people safe; supporting children and young people through the impact of Covid-19 and setting children and young people up for the future.