

**Children and Families Service**  
**Update for Scrutiny - 13th July 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. This paper provides an update on some of the key trends that have been seen in respect of service demand and activity and advises on ways in which practice approaches and services delivery have been adapted over time in response to the Covid-19 situation.

A strategic workstream on *Adapting Support and Services for Children and Young People* chaired by the Group Director, Children, Adults and Community Health, has now been established to plan further phases of work and to ensure that a strategic and coordinated approach is taken to planning the second phase of our response to the impact of Covid-19. This workstream 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.

## **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 54 referrals per week in the months of April and May, and the first half of June. These weekly averages are 41% 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 13 Section 47 (Child Protection) enquiries per week during the months of April and May, and the first half of June, which is 55% lower than the weekly average of 29 Section 47 enquiries started prior to lockdown (based on April 2019 - February 2020 data).

## **Other key trends**

As at 19th June 2020, there were 284 children on a Child Protection Plan - this is an increase compared to the number just prior to the lockdown in response to Covid-19 when there were 258 children on Child Protection Plans (in the first week of March 2020). The rise in numbers is due to a reduction in the number of children ceasing to be subject to Child Protection Plans rather than an increase in the numbers becoming subject to Plans, as is indicative of the challenges that the recent restrictions have presented in undertaking effective work with families to help them to reduce the level of risk to their children.

The difficulties in progressing planned work with families in the current situation are also impacting on the numbers of children remaining open on Child in Need plans and we have seen an increasing in the number of children that are subject to court proceedings due to the challenges of progressing and concluding proceedings, particularly where these are contested or where specialist assessments that can only be undertaken through direct contact with families are required.

As at 30th June 2020, there were 440 looked after children - this is a fairly moderate increase compared to the number of looked after children before the Covid-19 situation (431 looked after children in the first week of March 2020), however the underlying trend is possibly greater than the figures suggest as there has been a decrease in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children accommodated by the local authority in the corresponding period (44 at end of March, 37 at end of June).

- *Domestic abuse referrals to DAIS*

The number of referrals to DAIS has significantly increased, with an average weekly referral rate of 34 during the months of April and May and the first half of June. DAIS usually averages 25 referrals per week, with this peaking at 40-41 referrals for two weeks in May, and for the week ending 19th June. 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. Numbers of referrals to Children's Social Care in relation to domestic abuse has continued at a similar rate to those seen before lockdown, in contrast to referral for other types of abuse and the overall significant drop in referral rates.

### **Changes in Practice and Recovery Planning**

As lockdown restrictions are eased by the Government, Hackney Children and Families Service have been regularly updating their guidance to practitioners in respect of visits to children and families to ensure that this is safe for staff and service users and Senior managers are monitoring data on key performance indicators on a weekly basis.

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 immediately following lockdown measures being introduced, 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. As lockdown measures have eased the service has increased the number of direct visits being undertaken and we are continuing to review each individual case to identify those children that need to be visited as a priority and to define the frequency of visiting. We are now planning to move towards a more regular

pattern of direct visits to all children and their families and are working with corporate colleagues to make sure that there are practical arrangements in place to enable staff to access office space between visits to enable this to happen. With lower risk cases, we will be adopting a blended approach of direct visits and virtual contact appropriate to the needs and risks for each individual child. Risk assessments are being undertaken for all staff and we know that for some practitioners it will not be appropriate to expect them to undertake visits. Some staff are also still balancing child care or other caring responsibilities with their work duties. Our Unit model provides some level of resilience in ensuring that there are a number of people that know the child or understand their history and needs meaning that, where visits cannot be undertaken by the social worker that usually sees the family, other members of the Unit are able to 'step in'.

Following lockdown measures being put in place most of the Young Hackney universal provision for young people 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 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 has been managed virtually and there are an increasing number of cases that have been delayed as they cannot be heard until the courts are able to open up again. Stratford Youth Court will reopen on 6th July. The social distancing requirements mean that there will be fewer hearings undertaken than prior to the lockdown. We expect slightly more court business to be progressed, with August, September and October likely to be particularly busy in terms of assessments, court reports and new sentences.

Risk assessments are being undertaken in relation to the reopening of Adventure Playgrounds and of Youth Hubs for limited face to face provision over the coming weeks. Work to develop and publicise the summer offer from Young Hackney is underway, this is likely to include playground summer playschemes, hub summer playschemes and evening groups for adolescents, and increased delivery in parks and open spaces by the sports team. A number of meetings have also been held with voluntary sector organisations, including those that are commissioned through the Young Hackney framework, to explore what activities these agencies may be able to offer and weeks.

The digital devices for children with social workers and care leavers that were pledged by the DfE in April arrived in the first week of July and we are working closely with colleagues in Hackney Learning Trust on the distribution of these. Whilst most will be distributed via schools a number will be directly distributed by our social work services.