

Local Members Interest
N/A

Safe and Strong Select Committee - Tuesday 01 September 2020

Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSSCB) Response to Covid-19

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Select Committee:

- a. Notes and endorses the approach taken to response;
- b. Endorses the approach to understanding the impact and risks associated with the COVID-19 response and the role the SSSCB has in this by gaining assurance from the wider children's system.

Report of Cllr Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Summary

1. This paper details the approach that the SSSCB has taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It identifies the high-level impacts of COVID-19 on the wider children and family services, the commissioned providers and education settings during the period of 24 March 2020 to August 2020 including the easing of some restrictions.
2. It also describes the learning from the response phase, the high-level impacts, risks and progress whilst recognising the aspects required for a continuing recovery phase.

Report

Background

3. On Monday 23 March 2020, the Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced to the nation that the COVID-19 virus was expected to reach unprecedented levels and was at that of a pandemic. The government took the step of initiating a full lockdown of activities and social movement in order to attempt to contain and mitigate the predicted impact.
4. It is the biggest, longest, deepest peacetime emergency we have ever faced, and it is unlikely the world will ever be the same again – it has changed in ways we could not have anticipated.
5. It is acknowledged that the public health measures that have been put in place to manage this (social distancing, infection prevention and control) will be with us for

some time and “going back to normal” is not an option in the short or medium term.

6. The impact and measures required to manage this in support of children and their families in Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire required a range of decisions and changes to the operating functions and activities delivered by all providers in order to maintain safe service delivery.
7. Throughout the period outlined it should be recognised that from the Department of Education, Public Health England and other regulatory and statutory bodies there were over 200 pieces of new, additional and amended pieces of guidance. Core statutory legislative changes were also made to the Children and Families Act and easements to the SEND Code of Practice. All required assimilation and local interpretation prior to being communicated to staff, partners, education settings and commissioned providers. List available at Appendix 1. The dissemination and distribution of these updates was achieved through regular liaison with partners and through the developed media channels of Twitter; Facebook; Website and a Covid newsletter.
8. Whilst the SSSCB recognise that this step was necessary, its effects disproportionately affect children as the sources of support that were previously available to most children and young people, including school and a network of friends and extended family members, have been removed. Additionally, there has been an increase in family stress for households facing additional financial and social pressures from COVID-19 (RCPCH, May 2020). Through a range of mechanisms such as questionnaires, surveys and audit activity SSSCB has gained assurance from all key partners that those children and families who have a cause for concern have remained a priority for all partners to continue engaging with.
9. As a result, the SSSCB have been monitoring and gaining assurance from the wider children’s system to determine the approach moving forward with an aligned partnership risk assessment.

Role of the Safeguarding Board

10. In Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) the role and statutory function of the Safeguarding Board stipulates that:
‘A safeguarding partner in relation to a local authority area in England is defined under the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017) as: (a) the local authority (b) a clinical commissioning group for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area (c) the chief officer of police for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area’
11. In order to work together effectively, the statutory safeguarding partners with other local organisations and agencies should develop processes that:
 - a. facilitate and drive action beyond usual institutional and agency constraints and boundaries

- b. ensure the effective protection of children is founded on practitioners developing lasting and trusting relationships with children and their families
12. It should be recognised that each organisation will have their own recovery plans however it is the role of the SSSCB to support and enable local organisations and agencies to work together in a system where:
- a. children are safeguarded, and their welfare promoted
 - b. partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children
 - c. organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively
 - d. there is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats
 - e. learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice
 - f. information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families – extract from Working Together 2018

Covid 19 oversight

13. As part of the role of the SSSCB there has been wide engagement with all safeguarding partners to ascertain the stages and the remit of their recovery plans. It should be recognised that no partner has withdrawn its services fully and the commitment of the wider children's workforce to maintain levels of service for vulnerable children and families has been outstanding.
14. Safeguarding workforce training during Covid 19: face to face training has been removed and online/webinars/podcasts etc. have been made available and developed e.g. – level 1 E-learning and core level 1 slides have always been available; a blended learning package for level 2 is being developed and will be launched in September; levels 3 and 4 specialist training based around Board priorities are commissioned. Feedback from partners has been really positive with more demand than would be normally expected for these virtual training opportunities.
15. New Era (Domestic Abuse service) report a maintained service throughout the pandemic for both victims and perpetrators via remote working arrangements. Service users' risk have been assessed and contact with all service users has also been maintained.
16. The contextual safeguarding MACE panels, although paused for the first month (March 2020), resumed quickly and are running virtually and are positively well attended by partners seeking solutions and positive outcomes for vulnerable young people. There is an audit planned of the panels to assess the wider impacts and outcomes of Covid-19.
17. The level of assurance from the SSSCB has been maintained by increasing its frequency of meetings whilst continuing with its business as usual activities and

meetings. A specific partnership meeting has been in operation from April 2020 and meets fortnightly for all partners to share and discuss concerns and successes. This allows for a rapid response to any emerging concerns which can be escalated to the SSSCB who have also upped their meeting to monthly to ensure strategic oversight.

18. As a result of all these meetings and activity a risk assessment and recovery plan has been developed. The results of these questions and assessment can be found in a very detailed Appendix 2.
19. The key findings from this are;
 - a. All partners are into recovery planning.
 - b. There are backlogs which will impact on recovery, for example the recovery of the courts will significantly reduce capacity for some considerable time, this is a national issue and one that the judiciary are scoping a recovery plan to mitigate
 - c. All agencies foresee an increase in demand, but there is a lack of consistency about what we should be planning for. One organisation is planning for 3 scenarios (10%, 20% and 30% increases.) Given the level of uncertainty this seems a pragmatic approach and one the board has recognised and requested to be reflected as the risk assessment is refreshed
 - d. No partners have plans to stop and reduce services levels as we respond to a potential increase in demand or experience local lock downs.
 - e. Access to PPE is of concern to some partners
 - f. The implementation of track and trace is presenting an additional pressure for the partnership's recovery efforts and this is a particular pressure for some partners.
20. The risk and recovery plan will be reviewed monthly at the SSSCB in order to have assurance of safety of children across the wider children's system

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 - COVID Guidance for Children's Services Departments 06/20

Appendix 2 - SSSCB Partnership Risk Assessment of COVID 07/08/20

Contact Details

Assistant Director:	Kate Sharratt
Job Title:	Assistant Director for Improvement and Development
Telephone No.:	01785 895974
E-Mail Address:	katherine.sharratt@staffordshire.gov.uk