

Appendix 2

Families and Communities (see Appendices 5, 5A, 5B and 5C for Communities)

Families and Communities have a number of recovery workstreams covering the full spectrum of services, these include:

- Workforce
- Youth Offending Service
- Education
- Children with a disability
- Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health
- Children Social Care

Each of the workstreams has monitored the impact on the services they deliver and the children and families we service and have workplans in place that outline the arrangements in place to mitigate the impact and to recover services to pre-COVID levels.

Workforce:

The numbers of colleagues available for work has remained consistent however there has been a recent increase in sickness and leavers compounded by challenges recruiting agency social workers to support. Despite this, we have continued wherever possible to provide consistency of services for children and families across Staffordshire with some aspects still being delivered through virtually. The recovery plan covering areas of the service is addressing the plan to move into a new way of working maximising virtual opportunities whilst maintaining face to face relationship-based contact where required. The children's system transformation is now progressing alongside the COVID recovery planning and as such the impact on the workforce across each area cannot be separated.

The wellbeing of the workforce remains high priority with team managers discussing the impact of COVID in supervision and one to one sessions. Additionally, self-care workshops continue to be delivered to colleagues from workforce development to support this. In the recent children and families health check, 78% stated that their wellbeing is important to their manager and within the national social work health check which compares our responses against the LGA Standards for Employers of Social Workers we scored above both regional and national averages for our support for social workers during COVID.

The training offer continues largely to be delivered virtually however with some training now taking place face to face in a COVID safe manner where appropriate – in February 85% of the children and families workforce responding to the health check confirmed they find virtual training easier to attend and would like this to continue. The programme of support for newly qualified social workers has been redesigned to take into account the experiences of new workers during their training and will now include face to face support in small groups. Similarly, development of the student programme has also been progressed to ensure we continue to offer high quality student placements supporting Staffordshire County Council as a learning organisation alongside developing our recruitment strategy.

Youth Offending Service:

The numbers of children known to the YOS is now up to expected levels and the backlog in courts has now reduced to normal levels. The YOS Management Board have included 'Learning from COVID' within the Annual Youth Justice Plan and will be monitoring full recovery through the quarterly Board meetings

Education:

There has been a rise in emotionally based school refusal, in some children this is new and for others this has become more entrenched over the last few months. We have had a session with the EP service to review how we can use the graduated response toolkit on emotionally based school refusal. The Virtual School EP is leading solution circles to look at solutions for individual children.

There has been a large increase in demand for attachment and trauma training for schools.

There has been a dip in Personal Education Planning (PEP) completion rates 84% in the Spring Term compared to 96% in Spring 2020 due to impact of social worker shortages and case load pressures. Where PEPs are being completed, we are seeing a rise in quality in all key stages of education e.g. PEPs rated good or outstanding rose from 57% in Spring 2020 to 83% in Spring 2021. This reflects the training and focus on PEP quality.

We have seen increasing numbers of children being educated at home due to closure of bubbles in schools. We had 94% attendance at the start of the summer term and we currently have 84% attendance.

Recovery for children in care will focus on ensuring that PEP completion rates are back to their pre-pandemic levels however given the benefits of on-line PEPs we will continue to have a mixture of face to face and online meetings. Children in care have been consulted in the development of a policy for future PEP meetings.

The governing body of the Virtual School is overseeing a COVID recovery plan with a view to minimising the impact of gaps in learning on attainment and progress. The Governing Body has also specifically focused resource in supporting early years and post 16 children where we had seen some dip in uptake of early years provision and an increase in the number of children not in Education Training or Employment.

As part of the DfE response to the Children in Need Review and the impact of the pandemic on children with a social care involvement, a set of new duties have been announced for the Virtual Head with the expectation that they are implemented from September 2021.

The VHT will be expected to

- **be a strategic leader**
- **champion the cohort of children with social workers**
- **enhance partnerships with education settings.**

- **engage with a research partner to develop an evidence of what works for children with a social care involvement in education.**

Staffordshire has been allocated 146K to implement these duties and consultation is taking place on how these duties will be implemented by Staffordshire.

Since 8 March 2019, Staffordshire schools have continued to report strong attendance levels across mainstream schools; whilst special schools have also seen positive attendance, as is to be expected, this sector is struggling to fully engage all its families in regular full-time attendance. Across all of Staffordshire schools we have continued to ask schools to contact the family social care worker if the child's attendance is a concern, additionally we have monitored those parents who have failed to return their children to school, ensuring that in each case the school has put strategies in place to address the causal factors. In addition, we have re-introduced the issuing of penalty notices to parents for unauthorised leave and irregular attendance. Since the 8 March, we have issued 580 penalty notices and have received 142 requests from school for interventions relating to attendance. Current attendance data available to SCC indicates attendance overall to be at 94.1%. The last full year of pre-Covid data for 2018/19 showed overall attendance at 95.4%, so as expected there is a slight reduction.

Children with Disabilities

The third lockdown in the early part of 2021 proved the most difficult for us in respect of adequate capacity on the care market for children with disabilities, which was compounded by the cumulative effect of the Pandemic over time on the resilience of the families in receipt of support, as they had in many cases taken on more care themselves whilst isolating clinically vulnerable and extremely vulnerable family members during 2020 and the early part of this year. As a result, we needed to source more packages from non-contracted providers to fill what was a 'care gap' from January-March. Whilst we succeeded in maintaining packages of care throughout this did have a knock on effect on spend, and where at the end of quarter 3 we were under-budget for this provision, by the end of quarter 4 our spend overall came in at around £0.2M over budget for agency provided care. The overspend of £0.2m in 2020/21 (s17 payments) was offset however by other underspends in the Disability Teams budget (e.g salaries £0.1m / direct payments £0.250m). The Disability Teams budget overall in 20/21 was £4.3m vs spend £4.1m i.e. an overall underspend of £0.2m.

As the demands on the care market have eased a little through the spring we have been able to source the majority of packages via framework providers, but an over-reliance on a small number of providers, particularly in East Staffordshire, does mean the capacity from the market for this provision is likely to remain challenging for the remainder of 2021. Plans to address this are set out in another Cabinet Paper - **Intensive Support for Children with Disabilities** - which is scheduled for discussion at Cabinet in July 2021

What recovery will look like for the Children's Disability Care market moving forwards

SCC must provide care and support for children who meet the eligibility criteria for this under relevant provisions within the Children Act 1989, Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act 1970, and Children & Families Act 2014 amongst others. Our current market lacks breadth and sourcing urgent packages, particularly for children with the most complex needs, is challenging. From the summer, we will be preparing new specifications for this support, undertaking extensive market engagement activity, and ultimately openly tendering for this to attract new entrants to the Staffordshire Market.

By establishing a Dynamic Purchasing System crucially this will allow us to add more providers over time, under properly contracted arrangements. The detailed plans for this piece of work are included in Cabinet proposals for **Intensive Support for Children with Disabilities**, discussed at Cabinet in July 2021. Evaluations of the success of this approach will be reported to the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee from next year, once new contracts go live on April 1st 2022.

Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

The impact of the January lockdown and related restrictions has resulted in increased demand across the CAMHS system.

Referrals into the SCC and CCG commissioned service for emotional health and wellbeing demonstrate this increased demand and have been consistently high since January 2021. Recovery approaches are underway with work in schools and communities resuming where it is possible to do so. Plans include school transition workshops, peer support groups and a series of short support sessions for children and young people over the summer. Virtual delivery enables children, young people and parents/carers to fluidly access support via group and individual intervention sessions, whilst face to face delivery has also begun.

The Staffordshire e-newsletter (Kind Minds) continues to be developed and issued to share information regarding services, training and resources to support children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. Initially with an intended audience of education professionals this has a growing reach. Currently a feedback survey is out for completion to ensure that this partnership newsletter continues to be of value and is meeting the needs of its audience effectively.

SCC Officers have representation at the STP/ICS CAMHS Board and are therefore involved in workstreams linked to governance arrangements across the system, the emergence of an access policy, post COVID clinical planning, looked after children and the development of a system-wide landing/web page.

The DfE/DHSC 'Well-being for Education Return' project webinars have now been successfully delivered across Staffordshire. Feedback from education professionals in attendance suggests that these sessions have provided reassurance, useful resources and local service information.

What will recovery for Children's Mental Health look like going forwards?

More recently, the DfE have announced a second phase called 'Wellbeing for Education Recovery'. SCC intend that early years and staff wellbeing will be our focus. SCC are currently exploring a range of ideas including a virtual gym and wellbeing sessions, along with Mental Health First Aid and personal resilience training. We are also exploring peer support apps for both education staff and young people.

Mental Health Support Teams in Schools (MHSTs) delivery continues to develop in the post lockdown school environment across the three districts of Staffordshire that now have coverage. Recent announcements via the CCG suggest that one additional district of Staffordshire will gain an MHST in January 2022.

Domestic Abuse

The impact of the January 2021 lockdown and subsequent recovery over March – June 2021

In the October 2020, we reported that at the end of quarter 1 (April – June 2020) performance remained comparable with the same period in the previously year. At the start of the first lockdown, New Era (our commissioned domestic abuse services provider) saw a drop in the number of referrals to the service, although these did pick up again in May and had reached the level of the previous year by the end of May / early June. After the first lockdown was lifted, numbers of referrals increased by approximately 5% on those recorded at the same point last year. Following the return to school in September 2020, demand for services increased further. Initially this increase was not unusual, as referrals tend to increase at the start of school terms. However, the number of referrals has now reached volumes of around 30% greater than the same period last year.

What recovery will look like moving forwards?

Staffordshire Commissioner's Officer are the lead commissioner for the domestic abuse contract, which is jointly funded by SCO, Staffordshire County Council and Stoke City Council. The three commissioning organisations continue to work closely together and with the provider to mitigate against the impacts of the Covid pandemic on service delivery.

Since the first lockdown, domestic abuse support services have significantly adapted their delivery methods to ensure continuity of service and credit should be given to the dedication of their staff through this extremely challenging period. Services retained their 'front door' to victims and their families and the perpetrator programme has been adapted appropriately. For both victim and perpetrator services, availability of support and services has been maintained throughout the pandemic, largely via remote working arrangements and online delivery but with some face-to-face support where appropriate and safe to do so.

Recent funding secured from the Ministry of Justice, along with some identified underspend within the contract, has enabled the Victim Service to fund additional posts in areas of the service which are experiencing high demand. In addition, commissioners are identifying additional resources to address demand and to further increase staffing capacity. They are working with New Era to understand how waiting

lists can be reduced and what the financial investment would need to be to facilitate this.

CSC Recovery

Demand for services & referrals

FRT report referrals remain static across the system with a slight reduction in the number of phone calls and contacts. A reduction in referrals is anticipated due to the impending closure of schools for the summer holidays; however, this is a yearly occurrence; therefore, referrals are now reported to be at pre covid levels. The majority of referrals tend to be for the Early Help Service and whilst some areas have seen an increase in EH referrals, there has been an overall reduction from March to May.

One of the key challenges is the delay with some of the tier two providers who have accrued some backlogs with a waiting list of up to 10 weeks. This has also been compounded by the fact some tier two services are still not delivering face to face services. The EPDO's are working closely with these providers to address areas of concern and provide advice and support.

The demand for children's placements has continued with a national and local shortage of placements equipped to offer the placements that meet the needs of children with the most complex needs.

Children with a disability, many remained attending school on a part-time time table with little or no direct health support and extremely restricted short break/respite support. Hospice support has been significantly reduced, home care support has been difficult to acquire due capacity in the system and the impact of covid on adult services- with many older adults remaining in their homes in preference to residential care. This has led to an increased number of families experiencing significant pressures and reaching breaking point with more disabled children either on the edge of care or coming into care.

There has been an increase in prevention referrals in YOS; however, there are no current concerns regarding the ability to allocate work. There are no current backlogs in the criminal Courts.

Court capacity

The closure of the courts for a period during each lockdown and the move to virtual hearings has had a significant impact on the timeliness of both private and public law cases, the 'backlog' has technically been removed by the allocation of court dates to all cases however, these are significantly more delayed than pre-covid timescales. In children's social care the impact of the delays is that court proceedings are lasting up to 46 weeks rather than the previous 26 weeks, in practice, this means children and families experience uncertainty and delay in planning, additional assessments, statements and direct work is required over the duration of proceedings including extra statutory reviews and social work involvement is extended in many cases-

therefore impacting on the capacity in the system and the number of children in our care.

Venue capacity

Restrictions around building/room/ cleaning capacity to support family time arrangements will remain in place until 1st October 2021.

Fostering Service have raised concerns in relation to the ability to convene the much needed and valued foster carer support groups due to the current restrictions and venue capacity.

Returning to the office

A key part of CSC's recovery planning is in respect of the return to the office for staff. Whilst the Government has announced this week a plan of, 'everyone back to work' from 19th July 2021, the Local Authority have confirmed the current restrictions will remain in place until 1st October. Steve Lycett continues to have lead responsibility for this and will be responsible for the implementation and monitoring of this.

The group considered the continuation of the restrictions post 19th July would have an adverse impact upon several areas and felt staff should be encouraged to return to the office without delay. Key concerns include:

- The emotional wellbeing of the staff who will have to continue to work in isolation given the very limited opportunities to meet their teams and receive the required emotional support given the nature of the job they do.
- It is anticipated there will be an influx of new staff joining the LA over the next few months and it is imperative they receive the practical and emotional support from their team from the outset
- The need to work closely with the teams to plan and deliver the aims and objectives of the transformation.

What will recovery look like, what is SCC responsible for and how will this be managed

CSC have been operating as BAU for many months. FRT and respective HOS will continue to monitor, review and plan accordingly as referrals are received. There has been a marked increase in the complexity of referrals received and more recently we have seen a noticeable increase in incidents of family breakdown for older teenage children especially, who have required the support of IPS or have needed to be looked after by the Local Authority. Family Meetings / FGC will continue to be progressed by all Team Managers and Social Workers for all families to ensure a plan of support is in place without delay.

The Local Authority has also seen an increase in referrals for self-harm indicating a deterioration in parental and child mental illness as a consequence of the covid pandemic. FRT will continue to monitor and review these referrals and ensure families are progressed in a timely manner and are signposted to the right services at the time of need. The Social Workers in school's initiative will also have a key role in monitoring and reviewing this cohort of children.

Recovery for CWD will be children having full access to all aspects of their support packages to ensure short breaks provide families with carer relief to enable them to continue caring for their children.