

***PEOPLE: A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL OUR RESIDENTS***

**Children's Social Care**

**NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE & CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE INFORMATION**

Our current figures as regards Children's Social Care statistics are as follows:

Child in Need	357
Child Protection	237
Children in our Care	399

**KEY PRIORITIES**

Our priorities over the past six months and since the onset of the pandemic has been 'Business as Usual' but this has been undertaken in different ways.

- There has remained a clear focus on our statutory services and our duty to assessment and plan for all children subject to child in need plans, child protection plans and in our role as corporate parents. Social work staff and our support service staff have maintained direct face to face visits for those families most at risk. There were some early issues as regards obtaining the correct PPE, but systems were in place by the end of April 2020 to ensure our staff had the correct equipment and that PHE guidelines were followed. Other alternative forms of contact with children and families have been used to stay in touch and to form relationships and make assessments. Virtual visits, garden visits, face time and the use of social media has been used responsibly to work as effectively as possible with families.
- There have been strong links with our schools and settings during lockdown and the relaxing of lockdown. Using the same risk assessment tool to determine an offer to our most vulnerable children and families has been a good example of children's social care and education colleagues working together.
- Work has been undertaken to develop our Quality Assurance Framework through thematic audit activity and routine audit activity. This is key to aiding our level of understanding of both outstanding good practice and practice which requires improvement. We all look forward to our third practice week in November 2020 which will have a focus on the Local Authority as Corporate Parents.
- Work has begun to update our Self Evaluation Framework across all parts of children's services. This exercise is cathartic in terms of it highlighting the journey travelled within children's social care and helps us to prepare for the sharing of the journey we are on with Ofsted.

**What our data tells us**

The Children's Advice and Duty Service 6 month review held in June 2020 highlights a job well done. There has been a downward trend in the number of referrals with 469 less open referrals compared to 12 months ago. Our front door service is deemed to be a success story and can be held as an example of good practice. The impact of Covid-19 did see a drop in referrals at point of lockdown, but by mid-May contacts into children's social care and new referrals were back to pre-covid levels. A strong message was sent out to the public that our service was very much accessible and open if anyone had concerns about the welfare of a child. This proved to be effective.

The timeliness of our assessments has increased to 89% within timescales. The average over 2019/20 was 61%. Our social work staff have continued to prioritise their assessments of vulnerable children and our compliance levels have increased despite the impact of Covid.

Our looked after children figure has remained steady at around 400 over the past few months and the demand for external commissioned placements has not seen any increase. This has ensured that budgetary demands have not increased and this is despite the impact of Covid. However, during the autumn as children become more visible there may be a different picture to paint in the months ahead.

There has been a great deal of scrutiny and the driving of plans to ensure right across our service that the right children have the right level of intervention for the right length of time. This work has been supported by the implementation of CADS; by the strong early help offer; by the strong edge of care and adolescent offer; and by our staff ensuring cases are closed promptly or stepped down to the right type of plan to safeguard that child and family.

## **ADOLESCENT SERVICES**

The Adolescent Services delivered two Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) programmes over the summer holidays. These programmes were funded by the DfE and coordinated via Spring North. The programmes offer activities and meals to participants for 4 hours a day, 4 days a week for 4 weeks in August:

- **SEND HAF Programme**

This programme delivered activities and meals to children and young people identified as SEND. The YPS SEND team worked closely with the disability team to identify families deemed most at risk and who would benefit most from the programme. Eight young people were allocated places every day and this programme was delivered over 6 days including trips on Saturdays so delivered above and beyond the HAF remit.

Each YP was allocated a 1-1 worker daily who would deliver a range of activities and personal care. The programme was carefully planned to ensure resources and spaces were covid secure.

Feedback from parents/young people/elected members and the DfE was fantastic.

- **TYS HAF Programme**

This programme was offered to the full Targeted Youth Support cohort - approx. 150 children and young people. This cohort are referred in for casework support and are often from the boroughs most vulnerable families with often complex challenges including those on the cusp of care. Given the Covid situation most HAF providers delivered the vast majority of their programmes digitally (providing links to online activities). Given the nature of the children and young people we support, our HAF programme was planned to enable as many children and young people to attend physically and planning around transport, activities and resources had to be meticulous. the service delivered a wide range of activities including

bushcraft/watersports/drama/music and the feedback from young people and families has been overwhelming.

- **SEEDS HAF Programme**

The SEEDS HAF programme primarily focused work with children on the cusp of care, providing positive activities and new experiences throughout the summer holidays. Although staff and young people were unable to prepare meals due to Covid restrictions, the team provided families with a box of food ingredients and a recipe every day to support young person and their family to prepare and cook together at home. The programme was a great success with positive feedback from all involved.

### **Young People Services - Detached Youth Work Programme**

YPS has continued to deliver detached youth work throughout the Covid period and from early June BYZ and BRCT have joined the service to offer a comprehensive 7-day offer with up to 3 teams out some days.

The detached teams focus on areas of high Covid incidence and reported ASB to pass on key public health messages as well as supporting young people with guidance and signposting in what has been a very challenging period for our school/college aged cohort.

### **Youth Justice Service (YJS)**

In response, with colleagues from Community Safety, Police and Young People's Services, the Youth Justice Service adapted the 'Stay Safe' approach of delivering outreach work. Through the localised data for infection rates, as well as utilising local knowledge and intelligence, allowed the team to focus resources on hotspots to deliver public health information to young people and disperse groups. The events take place on weekends from the afternoon through to late evenings, when gatherings are most likely to be take place. They have predominantly been held in the wards where restrictions are in force or infection rates are increasing. With Police involvement this has also meant being able to respond to live intelligence received, where appropriate.

To date over three hundred young people and young adults have been spoken to through two events. They have been well received and are regarded amongst those involved as an effective means of directly tackling the issue. Further events are planned over forthcoming weekends and the YJS will continue to contribute staff to the events.

### **Engage**

The Engage team are now offering all the children they work with face-to-face contact in recognition of the positive impact this has in building and maintaining relationships, to help support and keep them safe. Alongside this, the creative new ways of working learned through Covid also continue to be implemented, with staff also engaging children through technology and activities such as football, bike rides and walks. The children have responded really well to the support offered and we continue to see positive outcomes achieved.

The positive outcomes have been evidenced within a recent audit of a number of cases within the Engage team. All of the cases audited highlighted effective multi-agency working with key partners from health, education, police and children's services across the borough. The impact of effective multiagency working was demonstrated in the children staying they felt safe, able to share information, knew everyone's role and had wider and deeper understanding of exploitation.

The relationship based practice that is utilised across all of adolescent services is key in securing and supporting positive changes and more importantly to sustain these changes for the most vulnerable children and young people of the borough.

### **PERMANENCE SERVICES**

Children and young people in our care, care leavers and children with disabilities have been RAG rated throughout the pandemic. This has helped to prioritise children and families who needed continued face to face contact and enhanced support throughout the last six months. The RAG rating has also helped us to monitor changes in levels of vulnerability. It is clear that children and young people and their carers managed better than could have been anticipated in the first three months but by the July some were feeling the strain and a number of placements became fragile or disrupted. Placement stability was however good in Q1, Q2 data is awaited.

There was greater demand for placements in August which came from a combination of disrupted placements (5) and new entrants to care (9 including 3 newborns). There has also been a pressure on placements caused by delays in care proceedings and in progressing children's care plans. However, we have managed to maintain a very low use of costly agency residential placements and the current number of commissioned placements is lower than it has been for some time. In house residential has operated at full capacity throughout.

Foster carer and adopter recruitment has continued largely using digital methods to advertise. The response to the foster carer campaign was good in Q1 with 12 registrations of interest and 9 assessments starting. Unfortunately 4 of these have since withdrawn and chosen to foster for independent fostering agencies. The response to the adopter campaign has also been steady and Adoption Now are optimistic that the target of 100 adopters for the year will be reached.

It was clear that by the beginning of September the majority of looked after children and care leavers were relieved to be returning to school and college. Whilst school can be a difficult environment for some, most children wanted to get back to their normal routine, to see friends and resume their leisure interests and activities. It also helped some children from July to resume face to face contact with their birth family albeit socially distanced and outside.

Foster carer feedback currently is that the resumption of restrictions because of the spike in infections is a challenge, particularly for adolescents in care.

The majority of children with disabilities have also returned to school and those who usually enjoy short breaks at Appletrees are in the process of being reintroduced where it is safe to do so. Agencies providing commissioned packages of care for children with disabilities are now operating at usual capacity. A very small number of children with serious health conditions are still shielding at home on the advice of health professionals.

## **EDUCATION**

### **Education Department - Lockdown to a full return to school – A brief overview. Information correct as of 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020.**

Schools and Settings in BwD have remained open during the full lockdown period for children who are vulnerable and children of key workers. Schools and settings also risk assessed those children and young people that schools identified as vulnerable and supported access to education during lockdown.

### **Safeguarding our children and young people**

From the moment Lockdown was announced for schools on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March – the LA produced a safeguarding and attendance document for all – this has been updated throughout lockdown and in line with government guidance.

We know that a protective factor for our most vulnerable children and young people is school; therefore, we requested all schools and settings hold a vulnerable child register to be discussed on a weekly basis with the safeguarding team in school.

We also asked all schools to RAG rate vulnerable learners into three groups: Red, Amber and Green.

**Red: Most risk of harm or neglect and fewest protective factors – For example those children on a CP plan, CIOC living at home, young carers.**

**Amber: A moderate risk of harm, but with some protective factors – For example those children on a CIN plan or an EHCP**

**Green: Some concerns escalating or unmet needs; or have been red or amber and need monitoring.**

We requested that if a child on the vulnerable register was not attending school and parents have requested they stay at home this **MUST** be discussed with the child's social worker and if CIOC child, the virtual headteacher. For children and young people with an EHCP our SEND team was also available for discussion.

Following advice from the DfE we expected schools and settings along with other agencies supporting the child i.e. social worker, health, SEND and Virtual school to have risk assessed each vulnerable child including those with an EHCP to access whether needs can be met safely at home.

**The LA requested additional safeguarding procedures be put in place and to be completed for children and young people on the vulnerable register who do not attend school – this included:**

- Those children rated **RED** i.e. subject to CP / CIOC with a care order at home / Young carers to have a **daily** call – speak to both family and child if possible. Log the call in your usual way

Any concerns should be shared in the normal process with the child's social worker or key worker.

**If as part of the risk assessment with social care – there is an agreement the number of calls is reduced, this must be logged on the risk assessment.**

It is important a weekly conversation take place with child's social worker.

- Those children rated **AMBER** i.e. subject to CIN / EHCP to have a **twice-weekly** call – speak to family and child if possible. Log the call in your usual way.

Any concerns to be shared in the normal process with child's social worker or key worker.

**If as part of the risk assessment with social care – there is an agreement the number of calls is reduced, this must be logged on the risk assessment.**

It is important a weekly conversation take place with social workers.

- Those children rated **GREEN** i.e. subject to a vulnerability you have identified possibly on a CAF or other plan - speak **weekly** to family and child if possible. Log the call in your usual way.

Any concerns should be shared in the normal process via the lead professional or CADs.

The LA also requested all pupils have a weekly message of where to access support if needed and requested this should be done through your whole school systems i.e. text or email. We also requested this should be made available on the school website.

**Along with the daily attendance return to the DfE, we also requested schools to send a weekly monitoring report to the LA of our most vulnerable learners.**

## **LA monitoring and support to schools and settings**

- Each school was placed in Locality based hubs to provide wrap around safeguarding support.
- Each hub had an LA lead to provide support as needed. This support was available for all schools within the hub.
- Support was provided throughout from our Virtual school for CIOC children and young people

Each Locality based hub had an:

- IRO providing immediate safeguarding advice, the IRO also contacted the schools DSL each week to discuss any key concerns that have arisen
- Family support worker providing support to families as an early intervention if needed.
- Link Educational Psychologist providing 1:1 support or advice to staff – this support was virtual.
- New directions support for yr. 11 and 13 learners.
- Link SEND support team to offer advice to school or families of SEND students if needed. Weekly check in with SENDCo
- Inclusion support officer to provide support to those families schools are struggling to engage.
- School Nurse to provide health support
- A CAMHs trailblazer team member provided emotional health support to the hub
- Each hub / partnered schools or stand-alone schools had a whole school safeguarding call with the LA lead to discuss staff resilience, monitoring of vulnerable learners, along with any further support needed during COVID 19 and partial closure.
- Safeguarding checklist completed by schools and reviewed with LA lead – **Academy trusts may have had their own checklist – the LA was happy for this to be used rather than duplicate work.**

The LA produced a weekly dashboard shared with all schools and setting via the head teacher's bulletin showing attendance using the DfE data and the vulnerable return data from schools.

The Vulnerable learner's dashboard showed the:

Number of school returns

Percentage of children and young people identified as vulnerable (including those with an EHCP)

Percentage of children identified as vulnerable under each category

Percentage of vulnerable young people who have a RA and of those the percentage agreed with social worker and parents.

Percentage of vulnerable learners who's RA deems they attend school

Percentage of these vulnerable learners who attend school.

Percentage of call made in line with LA guidance regarding the RAG rating of children and young people.

These Dashboards are also shared with RSC office and more recently discussed with OFSTED in a fortnightly meeting.

## **Planning for school opening**

BwD has been planning the extended opening of schools from 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020 via our school improvement strategy board (SSIG) – this board included lead headteachers from each school improvement group (7 in total), Secondary headteachers, post 16 leads, teaching schools, Health colleagues, mental health trailblazer colleagues, RSC colleagues, Education leads within the LA and wider children's services support staff. The SSIG met every week with the focus on extension of school wider opening, vulnerable learners and

the way ahead. The SSIG was enhanced by the development of sub groups which are detailed below and to provide a specific focus on supporting a consistent response to emerging and dynamic government guidance.

These sub groups group has included:

Early years

KS1 – 2 transition

Yr 6 – 7 transition

Post 16.

The Education team have since the beginning of lockdown engaged fully with lead headteachers of our school improvement groups, trust leaders, dioceses and unions. There was and continues to be a twice weekly headteachers bulletin distributed to all colleagues named above along with Chairs of governors.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020, the following advice was issued to schools within BwD:

*We are now in a position to advise schools and settings to prepare for the extended opening to identified year groups from Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> June.*

*It is important the return is discussed with your governing bodies and in line with the risk assessments completed.*

*If schools and settings can accommodate all identified year groups – we anticipate this happening over the course of the week- dependent on numbers and safety precautions following your school risk assessment.*

The Local Authority ensured a Risk Assessment was written and implemented. We had Risk assessments written for all LA maintained schools (including VA and VA schools to adopt. The LA agreed these Risk Assessments for all LA maintained schools (including VA and VC). It was the responsibility of academies and multi academy trusts to sign these off as the employer.

### **Supporting schools to become COVID safe**

#### **Wider school opening June 2020**

As indicated earlier – the LA have worked closely with all schools and settings regarding the safe extended opening of schools and settings.

The LA developed a Risk assessment for all maintained schools to adopt – this was also adopted by a number of stand-alone academies and trusts within the borough. The RA was also agreed by diocese and unions. Each Maintained school and stand-alone academy was offered a walk about by the H&S team at the LA to ensure the school was ready for the wider extension of opening.

The LA provided clear feedback if needed to schools who adopted the LA RA and once completed provided reassurance the RA was in line for a positive opening.

The HR department has also shared an individual staff RA for schools to complete for colleagues who are identified as vulnerable. HR support has been available for all schools and settings if needed.

The above was completed with a final check of H&S completed on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June – all schools and settings were identified as being ready to open on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June.

Our H&S and HR team have been available to answer FAQ from schools during our SSIG. A full FAQ document was available to all schools and settings.

One of our Academy trusts – STAR - approached the LA to support in writing a re-opening of schools document for all schools and settings. BwD agreed to this and continue to work with STAR to update the guidance.

Our Complex needs special school and LA maintained Early years settings have received PPE equipment in line with PHE advice for administering intimate care – once this guidance was shared. This was been given free of charge from the LA.

Each LA maintained school (including VA and VC schools and settings) have received an amount of full PPE equipment to use in conjunction with PHE advice for use of PPE. This was given to schools free of charge – we envisage the PPE lasting until at least October half term. The PPE equipment given included: hand sanitiser, gloves, aprons, masks and goggles.

Each stand-alone academy and trust was given the option for the LA to procure PPE equipment on behalf of the setting or trust. Some stand-alone academies and trusts took advantage of this from the LA.

### **Full school opening September 2020**

In line with government guidance a reviewed people and school risk assessment was shared with Maintained schools and settings (including VA and VC) to be adopted for September 2020 full school opening. These Risk Assessments were agreed with the LA as previously during the summer break. Academies who also buy into the Health and Safety SLA had Risk Assessments agreed by the LA.

### **Education response team**

In order to support schools in managing possible and confirmed COVID cases the LA has adopted and adapted the PH North West Resource booklet. This is kept under constant review following regular updates. The booklet gives schools confidence using a step by step guide on managing cases and outbreak management.

To compliment this the LA has created an Education response team to support schools and settings. The team consist of colleagues from BwD public health team, governor services, schools risk assessment co-ordinator, health and safety and HR colleagues. This team work with schools on a day to day basis – supporting the process of procedures to follow if there is a confirmed case. This service has also been opened up to Madrassah's within BwD. The team hold daily information of 'bubbles' that have to close due to confirmed cases in schools and settings. This information is shared within the children's services and education team to ensure safeguarding is the highest priority.

### **Data as of 15<sup>th</sup> September**

All schools and settings within BwD have opened to all children and young people following the summer break.

To date (as of 15<sup>th</sup> Sept) since the beginning of term:

16 schools have had to close bubbles. One post 16 provider and one early years setting.

30 bubbles have closed including the post 16 provider and early years without including these settings the number of bubbles would be 27 for schools only

There is a mixture of whole year groups, classes and limited contact (where the setting is able to identify contacts). Bubble sizes are dependent on the individual school and can range from a whole school year group at high school to half or individual classes. At primary the size is generally a class size.

The main issues/challenges for schools at the moment are:

Schools are the new frontline for discussing symptoms of COVID and managing parent's anxieties.

The system at all points has seen great strain eg schools have based on new guidance being issued have had to wait for health protection advice to close bubbles – this has been alleviated with the introduction of schools and LA's collaboratively making these decisions. As mentioned previously BwD have introduced a response team to support school enquiries and deal with issues raised.

Schools have begun to use the limited number of test packs sent at the end of Aug – we have a system in place in BwD to monitor this.

Attendance to date shows on average BwD has a slightly higher attendance than the national level. The attendance of children and young people with a social worker and those children and young people with an EHCP is slightly above national average. This is a positive start to the school year and reflects the commitment our schools and Services have in making sure our children's education remains our top priority here in BwD.