

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	272
Child Protection	181
Children in our Care	373

KEY PRIORITIES

Our priorities over the past eleven months and since the onset of the pandemic has been 'Business as Usual' but we have delivered our services in different ways.

- There has remained a clear focus on our statutory services and our duty to assess, plan and intervene 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. Our risk assessment tool focuses on gradings of Red, Amber and Green (RAG rating) where all Red risk assessed children and families receive face to face visits; Amber a blend of face to face and virtual; Green primarily virtual. This tool is totally fluid and is reviewed by team managers as cases progress within the system. Family Time for those children in care has been offered face to face to ensure that children are not deprived of their right to see their parents when it is deemed safe for them to do so. This has been well received and acknowledged by the judiciary for those children in care proceedings, in particular, where we have joined up with Lancashire and Blackpool to ensure our offer for family time is similar across the county. Some of our older teenagers have enjoyed using social media and their smart phones to stay in touch with their social workers and social workers have fed back that this communication has sometimes brought about better communication and engagement. This practice for some young people will be here to stay.
- If Covid rules are finally relaxed on 19th July 2021, then the use of risk assessments will ease and the expectations will be business as usual in terms of face to face visits for all children. However, the use of social media and technology for some young people on a more ad hoc basis to 'stay in touch' and have meaningful communication will remain an additional option.
- We have recently – during June 2021 – participated in a peer review led by the LGA and the final report of their findings is due in three week's time. The theme was around our response to childhood neglect and the feedback of this piece of work has been shared with senior leaders in CSC and also including Denise Park, Mohammed Khan and Julie Gunn. The reviewers looked at 20 child care records at different levels within the service from early help to those becoming looked after. They also had privy to our most recent data and a total of 90 'quality' documents which demonstrated and gave examples of our culture, practice and vision. First impressions have been shared with us and are very favourable in that the peer reviewers saw examples of good practice right across the service. They could see an organisation where senior managers/leaders are in touch with the service, the staff and key partners and there was a clear golden thread of 'working with' and not 'doing to' at every level. They described a sense of energy within our organisation with the resilience of our staff during this pandemic being described as remarkable. It has been business as usual in spite of the pandemic which is a very positive message to share with our staff, our council and our key partners. There are some

recommendations to be take away to enhance our practice, and the full report will be available to us in three week's time which will provide the detail upon which we can further build upon.

- Work has been undertaken to further embed our Quality Assurance Framework through thematic audit activity and routine audit activity. During week commencing 17th May 2021 practice week was held with a focus on adolescence and the services we have in the borough to support young people. This was a positive week with learning circles, thematic audits, participation of young people, partnerships all contributing to the impact we have on achieving positive outcomes. The peer reviewers in June added to our positive findings by affirming that the offer to adolescents experiencing neglect received the support and services to meet their needs within our borough.
- Our Self Evaluation Framework now requires a refresh over the summer in preparation for a potential Ofsted inspection during the autumn of 2021. The context of Covid further needs to be set against the journey travelled in BwD within children's social care. This includes aspects such as manageable caseloads and the resilience and dedication reflected both by ourselves and affirmed by the peer reviewers during their time spent in our organisation.

What our data tells us

Early Help

There has been an increase in the number of CAFS which at the end of May was 719.

The increase has predominantly been for children aged 0-4 and 5-10 years.

We have seen a slight increase of CAFS from the 0-19 universal service who now hold 85 CAFS.

The roll out of e-CAF- a small number of lead professionals from across health and education have now completed the relevant training and signing of information governance agreements, but have yet to go live on the system.

CADS

Weekly Average Data	May 2020 (626)	May 2021 (1,223)	+ / -
Number of contacts into CADS	157	306	+95%
Number of children progressing to CSC	25	42	+17
Conversion rate – contact to referral	15%	14%	-1%

This data demonstrates how the model into CADS is working in terms of the increased number of contacts into children's social care, but then the numbers progressing to referral have remained steady. However, the reasons for contacting CADS increasing by 95% is particularly high and is likely linked to the relaxing of lockdown and more professionals having sight of children and wishing to share concerns/seek advice.

The offer of the early help advice line is being broadcast further to ensure that the contacts into CADS could not be explored at a lower level.

The weekly CADS data meetings address timeliness of outcomes; the sources of the referrals; the number received via telephone/email; particular cases on a thematic basis for example - sibling groups; HV referrals; unborns; homeless young people; all strategy discussions. These meetings are now extended to 1.5 hours as opposed to one hour per week.

RAST

91% of single assessments are completed within timescales and the average caseloads in RAST are 18 currently. This workload level is supporting the timeliness of assessments and the quality of such assessments. It is felt that this reduction in workload is then one reason for our child protection figures decreasing as a quality CIN plan is supporting the child and family more effectively – less firefighting and more proactive meaningful practice.

AST

The average caseloads in AST are currently 19. Again, this workload level leads us to expect high quality intervention and support which detracts from cases escalating and if they do need to escalate, the quality of analysis and evidence should be high.

The above matter of caseload capacity was raised in our recent Ofsted catch up with Sarah Urding where the direction of travel remains positive.

Despite the impact of Covid, the number of ICO's has gradually decreased since the implementation of the legal gateway panel – now at 53 – so I believe the ability for SW to be more effective, creative and to be supportive systemically is having an impact on how we intervene is working. The confidence of the team managers and the support from their service leads is steering the workforce to having different conversations – working with families and not doing to. Relationships are sound with our legal department and any issues are tackled effectively.

In summary less children are open within children's social care safeguarding teams and less children are entering care – there is a drive to ensure the right children sit within the service at the right level and for the right length of time. Open cases in RAST/AST in early June 2020 were 821 and in early June 2021 they are 723.

However, I would add that the complexity of cases and the demands in terms of intensive support from partners and our support teams does challenge staff time and capacity and the service leads are offering flexibility and support to the team managers to manage this.

The summer will be a test for us in terms of the further impact of Covid and the focus being on Lancashire upsurges in the Delta Variant and for BwD in particular. Staff morale fluctuates and it does feel relentless at times for our workforce in terms of understanding government guidelines and ensuring a service is offered. However their resilience and keenness to perform has been sustained despite this situation.

ADOLESCENT SERVICES

SEEDS – Adolescent Support Unit

The SEEDS service has been successful in its reassessment for the Investors in Children's award. The award recognises young people's involvement in the design and delivery of services. Feedback from young people interviewed highlighted the excellent work of the edge of care service and demonstrated the value of the service to young people and families. Young people's direct comments were extremely positive and the department is extremely proud of its offer, which is recognised as good practice by other councils who often visit or engage with the service for advice and support to establish similar provisions in other local authorities.

Participation

The newly merged participation and youth voice offer has all its CIOC and leaving care forums up and running and are working with young people to create a bespoke space at Kaleidoscope Youth Centre. A new co-produced Participation Strategy is being finalised, after a series of planned consultations with young people, professionals and partners.

The BwD Youth Forum have co-produced a Well-being Champions course with support from a Mental Health Professional Trainer, The course for young people will enable them to better support their peers in schools, colleges and youth organisations. Twelve young people from across the borough will take part in the training courses in August. This course has been sourced and developed due to the Youth MP's highlighting the impact of Covid on children and young people's mental health at a recent Children's Partnership Board meeting.

SEND Inclusion

Young people from the Kids Next Door ASD group have recently participated in national consultation regarding the impact of Covid on children and young people with SEND, the findings have been published in a report by the department of education.

The SEND Inclusion project is now full for Summer Scheme and HAF places due to popularity and demand. Children and Young People are RAG rated with colleagues to ensure the most vulnerable families are supported.

Children and young people will have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of activities such as sensory play, arts and crafts, outdoor activities such as canoeing, sailing, climbing, bushcraft and mountain biking and get a nutritious daily meal during the HAF programme. The SEND HAF summer programme will run over 6 days including weekends.

Targeted Youth Support

Plans have been finalised for the TYS HAF programme. Children and Young People will benefit from a minimum of 4 hours activity a day, for 4 days a week, for the 4 weeks of August. The activity plans include, Outdoor Education, Watersports, Music, Drama as well as trips and visits around the local area. All whilst remaining Covid Secure and enjoying a daily nutritious meal and door to door pickups/drop offs.

Positive Activity Team

As well as contributing fully to all the plans listed above; the Positive Activity Team has restarted its Duke of Edinburgh expedition programmes and has begun taking commissioned work from local schools again. The latest industry (National Youth Agency) regulations now allow a much wider range of activity including large outdoor groups and overnight/residential stays and YPS is busy planning Covid secure activity over the coming months.

EDUCATION

Our Education response team have continued to support our school and settings over this academic year. The relationship with our schools and settings has been excellent with schools and settings following track and trace advice for confirmed cases. The Education response team have held Outbreak management meetings with school that have been identified as a trigger for the number of cases. We are confident our schools and settings have remained COVID secure throughout the academic year – leaders within settings have ensured this is the highest priority. All school have taken part in Surge testing whilst Blackburn with Darwen has been in an Enhanced area of support. This has involved:

Primary schools – when a case has been identified with the agreement of parents / carers children within the bubble have received a PCR for themselves and all members of the household.

High schools – All Staff and Pupils (with agreement of parents) have taken part in PCR testing either at home or onsite.

Overall this has been a resounding success, and in no small measure has helped the Borough identify new cases and reduce the spread of the virus. Inevitably this has resulted in more identified cases and more pupils isolating as a result. Schools have worked hard to ensure online and remote learning has been stepped up in these cases.

We await further DfE guidance regarding the Autumn term. However the following advice has been given to schools:

Regular testing will pause in education settings over the summer except for in those that remain open such as summer schools, out of school settings and those that do not operate on a term-time basis. In these cases, only those attending should continue to test regularly.

The guidance for children in year 6 and below remains the same and we will not be advising them to test. This includes year 6 pupils attending transition days or summer schools over the summer break.

We want to help education settings to be prepared for all scenarios, including testing on return after the summer holidays. We will provide all schools and colleges with refreshed guidance, test kits, and PPE so that you can be ready to stand up on-site Asymptomatic Test Sites (ATS) from the start of the autumn term. We expect to be able to confirm the position alongside announcements on Step 4. Given the uncertainties about the Covid situation we will face in the autumn, we want to help secondary schools and colleges to be as prepared as possible for all scenarios, including testing on return after the summer holidays, if needed. Schools and colleges may choose to start testing students and pupils no earlier than three days before the start of term, or stagger the return of pupils during the first week of term if they would like to do so. This is voluntary and at the discretion of each school and college.

As of 10th June for this academic year, total missed days reported by schools to the DfE:

Confirmed Covid	9,214
Suspected Covid	15,667
Contact in school	130,141
Contact outside of school	54,826

Key priorities:

- Continue to ensure our schools and settings are provided the necessary support following latest DfE COVID guidance
- Support and encourage our young people to take part in regular testing over the summer period
- Provide the support necessary for our schools to be 'OFSTED' ready following updates to the Inspection handbook
- Ensure the Education recovery plan is embedded in schools and setting ensure the best outcomes for our children and young people.
- Continue to ensure safeguarding has the highest priority for all schools and settings – Each school and setting are currently completing a Section 175 audit. Section 175 of the 2002 Education Act requires local education authorities and the governing bodies of maintained schools and FE colleges to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are carried out with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Section 157 of the 2002 Education Act and the Independent School Regulations 2003 convey the same responsibilities on all other non-maintained settings.