

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

COVID-19 RESPONSE: CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on the current position in respect of the COVID-19 response across functions within Children and Community Resilience.
- 1.2 The response to date is set in the context of the business continuity arrangements, national guidance and the Council's mid-term recovery plan.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Council's approach to its business continuity response to the COVID-19 outbreak and actions taken to implement government guidelines have been rooted in the values, principles and ambitions of the Council Plan, and furthered through the strong partnerships within North Lincolnshire, framed under the following priorities:

- keeping people safe and well
- protecting the local economy
- enabling communities to remain resilient
- protecting vulnerable people

Whilst at the same time ensuring good governance and sound financial practice.

- 2.2 National advice and guidance has been incorporated into the local response as it has become available. The most recent national restrictions were announced on 4 January 2021 and The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 3) and (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 came into force on 6 January 2021.
- 2.3 Children, young people, families and vulnerable adults have, in the main, shown tremendous resolve and resilience in these challenging circumstances leading to stability and positive outcomes.

Our staff and those who work closely with us, foster carers, carers and partners, have shown immense care and collaboration through this time, in their ongoing commitment to helping children and families improve their outcomes.

- 2.4 Across Children and Community Resilience, we continue to help and protect children, families and vulnerable adults, prioritising the most in need, while we support and protect our workforce. Staff have continued to work hard and show incredible resilience, flexibility and innovation in our response to COVID-19 and as reported to Cabinet in June 2020, provide comprehensive input to the additional expectations required in response to adapting to and preventing the impact of COVID-19. There is an ongoing focus on staff welfare, and wellbeing checks have been and continue to be undertaken across the service. A range of mechanisms have been embedded to provide opportunities for staff to engage with their peers and managers, for support and supervision.
- 2.5 Key headlines in Children and Community Resilience functions in response to COVID-19 include:
- Business has continued across all functions, whilst simultaneously adapting and supporting the overall COVID-19 response. We have maximised digital technology and capacity across the social care system through deployment of staff to specific functions to maintain our 'offer to children'.
 - The Children's Commissioning Strategy, Helping Children and Families in North Lincolnshire document and the Children's Challenge have now been signed off. These strategic documents will set the foundations for driving forward partnership action and system change. Through our One Family Approach, we aim to create a system that works for all children, young people and families to achieve our ambition of children being in their families, in their schools and in their communities.
 - There has been a continued focus on developing and implementing the One Family Approach which has been supported by workforce development sessions with leaders, managers and practitioners. There are emerging examples of staff utilising the approach and measure success within the context of their practice. The One Family Approach is being used and adopted within the provision of all services and adopted in the review and re-write of other area wide plans for example the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health, Best Start and Special Educational Needs Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion plans.

- Under the auspices of the One Family Approach, there continues to be a focus on early help, and additional capacity is in place to co-ordinate early help activity and provide constructive challenge and support to meet the needs of children and families at the earliest point and through these challenging times
- Through the Integrated Children's Trust, there is a focus on maximising opportunities and maximising potential to address the hardship that children and families currently face within the context of COVID-19 and to contribute toward reducing inequalities and longer term disadvantage as a result of the pandemic.
- All cases open to children's social care are being reviewed in light of the Government guidance regarding the latest period of national restrictions w/c 4 January 2020.
- In line with Government guidance, and as deemed appropriate, there continues to be face to face contact with children and families in need of help and protection. This has been underpinned by local visiting guidance which is regularly updated to best reflect the current position.
- Virtual mechanisms have been embedded for engaging with children, young people and families leading to positive and enhanced engagement and outcomes.
- Key partnership meetings have continued virtually and there is evidence of strong partner contributions to assessments, plans and meetings at every stage of the child's journey. The Children's Multi Agency Resilience and Safeguarding (MARS) Board continues to meet virtually to have a line of sight on the safeguarding pathway.
- There is continued commitment to the Community Safety Partnership Board, Prevent Partnership Board and Channel Panel as well as strong partnership work on the front line as required.
- The Children's MARS Board remains committed to listening, learning, reviewing, and adapting which is reinforced by the republished local arrangements. There has been a range of scrutiny and assurance activity (including independent scrutiny).
- Services have continued to work within practice standards and we continue to develop creative solutions as part of our COVID-19 response and to meet our statutory and regulatory responsibilities. This is evidenced through regular monitoring, with leadership and management oversight, scrutiny and challenge.

- There has been a continuation of financial support mechanisms available for children and families facing hardship due to the pandemic. The COVID-19 winter grant has been rolled out to support vulnerable households and families with children through the winter period. A support package for children and families is in place and the local approach is to provide low income families with food vouchers and welfare assistance and support where needed. There will be a targeted approach to ensure those most in need can access the grants available.
- Nationally, there has been growing concern and focus on pre-birth to two year olds. Local practice has been reviewed and strengthened to mitigate the additional risk within the context of the pandemic. There are strengthened management oversight arrangements in place and enhanced connectivity between Children's Centres, FaSST, 0 to 19 and maternity services and we will continue to review this.
- There continues to be a priority focus on vulnerable children in education. The daily tasking meetings, which were established in April 2020 in response to COVID-19, are now embedded into practice and they are continually reviewed to reflect the changing context maintaining a one team approach to supporting more vulnerable children to access education as appropriate.
- There are robust support arrangements in place for Children in Care and Care Leavers. Foster carers have helped and supported children and young people and have gone over and above to care for children within this prolonged period and reinforced our high regard for them and their incredible commitment and valuable role they play.
- The 'Family Adoption Links' Regional Adoption Agency went live in October 2020 and North Lincolnshire is committed to contributing to a system that can achieve good outcomes for children and families. There is an ongoing focus on recruitment as a key priority area.
- We have continued to undertake family proceedings court work and North Lincolnshire has also led on the chairing of the fortnightly regional Humber Local Family Justice Board Sub Group. There is also a fortnightly youth court and a fortnightly trial court, both of which are operating well.
- There is an established multi agency communications group in place to proactively manage communication messages to contribute to children and families staying safe and well. A campaign has been launched, supported across the partnership, called #HowRUNorthLincs? which seeks to encourage local young people, parents, neighbours, and family members to look out for and ask the question 'how are you?'.

Messages are going out across social media, promoting the 'what to do if' you have concern about children as well as an advice page signposting to trusted sources of information and self-help guidance. Work is taking place with the Youth Council to further develop a young people focused social media presence, and plans are developing to launch targeted communications for parents and carers.

- Care Call has continued to function as part of the whole team approach to supporting the most vulnerable. The Care Call Pendant service supports over 5000 vulnerable people and provides much needed support to people in their own homes.
- Advocacy services remain in place and have been adapting provision (including virtual services) to ensure we have a continued service in place for families and children and ongoing support for young people who go missing.
- Staff from Children and Community Resilience are continuing to support council work on enforcement, support for local communities and those who are clinically extremely vulnerable (shielding).
- There is ongoing activity to ensure preparedness for potential Ofsted notifications and a responsive approach to changes in inspection frameworks. Ofsted's Local Authority Social Care programme will restart in February 2021.
- The Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting took place in November 2020 and was an opportunity to demonstrate a strong self-evaluation of all our services that help and protect children young people and families.
- The Families Initiative annual MHCLG spot check took place in December 2020 and was an opportunity to demonstrate our effective practice and the achievements and challenges of the local programme, which mirrors the principles of the One Family Approach. Positive feedback was received from the MHCLG.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Cabinet are asked to consider the report and note the update

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 Business continuity across Children and Community Resilience continues to be maintained and there is a continued focus on the wellbeing of our workforce.

5. FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)

5.1 The financial implications of COVID-19 are being closely monitored against the emergency funding from government. The impact of funding assumptions and financial sustainability are regularly reported to Cabinet.

5.2 There are children and families who need help and protection as a direct result of the pandemic who would not normally require services. Further support and capacity is likely to be required to support these families within the context of “hardship”

5.3 The recruitment and retention of children’s social workers and social care staff is a key priority.

6. OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)

6.1 Decision taken as part of the response to the crisis phase have been made in accordance with the Council’s schemes of delegation.

7. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

7.1 Not applicable for the purposes of this report.

8. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

8.1 Any decisions and actions taken have been done in consultation as appropriate.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That Cabinet notes the response to COVID-19 as outlined in the report.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Church Square House
SCUNTHORPE
North Lincolnshire
DN15 6NR

Author: Mick Gibbs

Date: 20 January 2021

Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: None