

# **Update on Support for Children, Schools & Families during Covid-19**

Health & Wellbeing Board

19<sup>th</sup> January 2021

# Social Care Response during Covid-19

- All children open to / or referred into our service had their needs assessed and a safety plan put in place.
- Adapted operating model following the introduction of 'Flexibilities' to primary legislation - blended approach of virtual and face to face visits.
- All children seen physically or virtually depending upon risk and need.
- PPE available to protect staff and families.
- Laptops and 4G routers for vulnerable children and young people provided by the DfE distributed to support children's education.
- Preparation and ongoing readiness to respond to a surge in referrals within MASH put in place.

# Changes as a result of Covid-19

- Increase in children looked after the start of Covid-19 rose from 461 in March 2020 to 523 in January 2021: These include 470 local and 53 unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- Reduced availability of local placements meaning reliance on costly out of borough independent sector placements.
- Pressures on the courts - children are not leaving care as planned.
- An increase in complex multi faceted safeguarding referrals: 65% of referrals converting to either a social work assessment or Sc.47 child protection enquiry (was 56% pre Covid).

# Changes as a result of Covid-19

- Average of 31% of all referrals during the pandemic had a domestic abuse related concern but rose to 63% over the Christmas period.
- Limited partner support in first lockdown due other agencies' resources being diverted to the Covid-19 response.
- Virtual working and working under strict PPE requirements have impacted on workers emotional wellbeing.
- Growing caseloads due to children not moving through the system at the same speed due to restricted services and support.

# Support provided to the workforce

- In addition to existing agency staff, 4 more agency workers have been approved to relieve the pressure plus funding for additional permanent staff from April 2020.
- Community Education Psychology - critical incident debrief to staff where there has been serious harm to a child during the pandemic restrictions.
- Additional HR support and supervision for staff provided.
- Additional Principal Social Worker support to work through complex cases with staff.
- Managers and agency staff provided cover over the 2 day Christmas break to allow staff to have an extended break.

# Continuing support for schools during COVID

- Operating the out of hours COVID line & emergency education line
- Monitoring outbreaks, tracking transmissions & holding IMTs as appropriate.
- Implementation of safeguarding arrangements to track our vulnerable pupils.
- Extensive communications to schools
- Remote learning support
- Development of Free School Meals offer
- Education representation on all relevant COVID groups
- Development of local guidance, procedural flowcharts and support has been extensive.
- Supporting schools COVID arrangements, mass testing and extensive HR support for school staff
- All children, young people and parent support outlined previously continuing.

# Ongoing Communications

- Daily Headlines to headteachers and chairs of governors.
- Frequent Letters to parents/carers supporting the key messages from schools and Public Health.
- Daily information updates on Solihull Website.
- The schools cell meets twice a week with headteacher and governor representation weekly.
- Weekly meetings with the trade unions all guidance is shared with unions prior to release.
- Weekly meetings with the Regional Schools Commissioner.

# Remote learning

- Recruitment of additional remote learning advisory teachers who have developed a large number of documents and resources.
- Networks of remote learning champions set up across the borough, good practice shared regularly.
- On-going bespoke support for individual schools to develop and improve their remote learning offer.
- CPD and training for staff on delivering remote learning.
- Model home learning agreements developed.



# Lockdown 3

- Outbreaks:
  - 13 pupil confirmed cases, with 237 pupils isolating
  - 21 staff confirmed cases, with 76 staff isolating
- High attendance continuing:
  - 14% average across all schools
  - 34% of vulnerable pupils
- Stepped up vulnerable children tracking arrangements
- Free school meal options:
  - School catering continuing
  - Food parcels
  - Local and national voucher schemes
- Roll-out of additional remote devices