

Report of the Strategic Director to the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 29 June 2020

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Subject:

Independent Monitoring of Residential & Respite Children's Homes during the COVID crisis

Summary statement:

Report on Children's Homes during the COVID crisis March to June 2020

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Portfolio:

Children's Services

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

- This report provides an overview to the Corporate Parent Panel of the arrangements in place supporting Residential and Respite Children's Homes during Covid-19

2. BACKGROUND

- Independent monitoring of children's homes is a regulatory requirement which requires the Independent Person to visit each of the LA 11 Children's Residential and Short Break Respite Homes at least once a month. The Children's Homes Regulations (CHR) 2015 set specific requirements for the independent monitoring and quality assurance of children's homes which includes;
 - To interview in private; the children, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as the independent person requires;
 - Inspect the premises of the home;
 - Inspect the home's records (except for a child's case records, unless the child and the child's placing authority consent) as the independent person requires.
- The purpose of the independent monitoring is to offer oversight, scrutiny within the home and for the Independent Person to form an opinion as to whether:
 - Children are effectively safeguarded
 - The conduct of the home promotes children's wellbeing
- Routines for the independent monitoring has been consistent and regular throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
- A statutory instrument was published on the 23rd April 2020 making unprecedented changes to regulations (secondary legislation) relating to the care and protection of vulnerable children and young people. The changes to ten sets of regulations came into force on the 24 April 2020 and are due to expire on 25 September 2020, (although this expiry date can be revoked) which set out the following in relation to monitoring and inspection of Children's Homes:
 - Monthly independent visits and reports on children's homes no longer mandatory
The law requires that every children's home appoints an independent person to visit the home at least once a month. The independent person must write a report on the home which in particular addresses whether a) children living there are effectively safeguarded and b) the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being. This report must be sent to Ofsted and local authorities. This requirement is being removed and instead providers will simply be required to "use reasonable endeavours" to ensure they occur.
 - Twice-yearly Ofsted inspections of children's homes no longer required
The law currently requires Ofsted to inspect registered children's homes at least twice a year and this requirement has been removed. Duties relating to the frequency of inspections have similarly been removed in respect of fostering and adoption agencies, residential family centres and holiday schemes for disabled children. Ofsted continues to have statutory powers to inspect in accordance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and is reported to

be “content with this change” to inspection frequency.

- Bradford CSC has maintained regular monthly monitoring of all of the Residential and Respite Children’s Homes to ensure robust safeguarding arrangements are in place. Monitoring has been facilitated through utilising technology to support remote monitoring, undertaking virtual monitoring tours of the homes, FaceTime video consultation with children and young people (CYP) and staff and by working collaboratively with homes Managers and staff to ensure all reasonable measures are in place to complete the Independent Monitoring. Recognising this has been a significant change in working practices and approaches the homes have worked hard to support the process providing information, communicating in an open, transparent and professional manner whilst supporting all CYP through such difficult circumstances.
- One home has had a remote monitoring process completed by Ofsted required due to compliance, following their full inspection. The home engaged in the process and were judged to be making progress.
- Recognising the challenges of working under such challenging circumstances monitoring and consultation has been able to identify the areas where homes have achieved good outcomes for our CYP. These include:
 - Good Education Routines for CYP accessing education in the homes
 - CYP access Daily Education Timetables
 - PE with Joe Wickes
 - Creative approach to delivering education
 - Adapting to individual needs
 - CYP achieving good levels of engagement in learning
 - Residential staff engaging CYP in vocational learning
 - Residential staff being creative and innovative in their approach to education to achieve positive outcomes
 - Links with Education Partners has developed to ensure mechanisms are in place to support CYP and staff delivering in-house education:
 - CYP have virtual links with Schools; telephone / video calls with named teachers / therapists
 - Virtual Tutors are in place
 - Virtual educational packs to engage CYP
 - BPP Education Specialist engaging CYP in bespoke learning at Willows
 - Access to educational resources has enabled homes to engage CYP in formal learning and informal / vocational learning.
 - Laptops / Tablets
 - Games / Equipment
 - Exploration of App based learning activities specifically for CYP with disabilities.
- The homes have worked well in minimising incidents of absence by CYP from the home. Whilst noted that there have been absences, the number of incident and frequency has been limited and the homes have ensured a proactive response. Arrangements have been in place to ensure informal interventions are in place to education and inform CYP of risks due to breaching social distancing restrictions. The number of absence within this three period (March – May inclusive) is as

follows:



- Missing

	Feb – Mar 20	Mar – Apr 20	Apr – May 20
Missing	10 Missing episodes relating to four CYP Inc.; one incident of missing by CYP from school	7 Missing episodes relating to six CYP	7 Missing episodes relating to six CYP

- Absent Without Authorisation (AWA)

	Feb – Mar 20	Mar – Apr 20	Apr – May 20
AWA	1 AWA incident relating to one CYP	0 AWA incidents	1 AWA incident relating to one CYP

- The homes have responded to absence recognising a number of factors; age, risk, vulnerability, behavioural norms. The homes have ensured action is taken, apply agreed strategies and operate in line with protocols to ensure the safety and well-being of CYP. As a consequence of such approaches, CSE risks have also declined in line with the number of absences across the homes. CYP continue to access virtual support and interventions from external agencies during this period; Advocacy Focus, CAMHS, WYP and the homes liaise with partners within CSC.
- Monitoring highlights that the home has responded to the risk of Covid-19 and implemented measures which have been highly effective in minimising the spread of infection within the homes to CYP and staff. All homes have
 - A Covid-19 risk assessments in place.
 - No CYP are not attending school.
 - Testing in underway
 - All non-essential visitor to homes stopped
 - CYP educated in regards to government advice
 - Homes operating with consistent staff
 - High Risks staff shielding
 - Self-isolating staff supported
 - Remote working practices in place for some staff to maintain work whilst shielding
- The homes operate with a number of staff shielding. Self-isolation has taken place as directed. Testing of CYP and staff is in place. Two CYP in one home have tested positive for Covid-19 within the May monitoring period. The home has responded proactively, implementing measures to avoid spread of infection. This has been effective and avoided any further spread.
- The processed for the completion of Regulation 44 independent monitoring has changed significantly during the period of Covid-19. The need for joint working has been heightened to enable access to information / documents for monitoring purposes. The support of the home and communication with; CYP, family, SW and IRO has been key to enhancing the overall quality of the monitoring. Monitoring has enable me to recognise the positive experiences and outcomes for CYP during this period;
 - The creative and innovative approaches from homes to make this period a

- positive and safe experience for CYP.
- The commitment and dedication of staff working flexibly and in the interest of CYP.
- Relationships within homes, between CYP and staff have strengthened
- CYP are investing in their individual placements
- Homes report that CYP are better engaged in education
- CYP are achieving educational successes
- CYP are thriving on the consistency and continuity of care and adhering (in the main) to the guidelines regarding social distancing restrictions.
- The homes are celebrating CYP successes.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 None

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

4.1 N/A

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

If there are no significant risks arising out of the implementation of the proposed recommendations it should be stated but only on advice of the Assistant Director Finance and Procurement and the City Solicitor.

5.1 N/A

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

6.1 N/A

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

7.1.1 None identified.

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

N/A

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

N/A

7.6 TRADE UNION

N/A

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

N/A

**7.8 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS
(for reports to Area Committees only)**

N/A

7.9 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

Whilst routines are in place to facilitate the monthly Independent Monitoring there should be regard to the limitations of virtual monitoring. Whilst every effort is made to ensure there is robust scrutiny from the Reg 44 process the home continue to prioritise the needs of CYP.

7.10 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

N/A

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

N/A

9. OPTIONS

N/A

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 It is recommended that Regulation 44 Independent Monitoring process continues to be completed via virtual visits, on a monthly basis offering a “business as usual approach”, rather than applying the government guidelines. This will maintain continuity of monitoring and contribute to the robust safeguarding arrangements which are in place.

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 None

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 12.1 None