

Experiences of Covid-19

Joint Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee 7 July

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To discuss perceptions of the experience of children and headlines from the operation of service during the Covid-19 emergency period

Structure of presentation

- Brief introduction
- Education issues
- Social care and related issues
- Family policy including free school meals
- Going forward summary
- Questions

Introduction

- The service has shown some significant strengths in the Covid-19 period. This presentation will show both strengths and challenges.
- The current situation may exacerbate issues children, young people and families were already facing if they were poor, had poor housing and insecure work - there are a number of national report coming out.
- Questions asked about exposed inequalities in children's access to technology, opportunities to learn online, safe space to play, food and availability of transport to allow for social distancing.
- Time will tell if these issues are fully evidenced in Lancashire.

Schools and other educational settings

Positives

- Approximately 10,400 children prioritised for attendance at school before wider re-opening
- Online working well for some children
- School's safeguarding worked well in partnership with local authority, Regional Schools Commissioner and other partners.
- Morale stayed high

Challenges

- Reduced access may impact on child development and possible decline in educational outcomes
- Pressure on families with a particular impact on children with SEND
- Lack of clarity about arrangements for exams, disruption to apprenticeship starts and youth employment
- Early years sector viability concerns

Social care and related issues

Positives

- Social workers, early help and other staff adapted to working remotely very quickly
- Children have been supported sympathetically when talking about feelings and voluntary sector support continued throughout
- Preparation for family safeguarding and other work on trauma informed practice prepared staff well
- Sickness absence was low in staff teams which allowed us to support children well
- Family courts functioned well 'virtually' as did visits using technology

Challenges

- National research shows young people have been anxious during this time and are also concerned about the future
- Children are possibly feeling isolated and suffering from grief – likely increase in referrals to CAMHS
- Difficult for children to speak openly about fears when using technology at home
- Pressure on parents when home learning and dealing with family issues
- Adolescents not able to congregate which is an important part of their development

Family policy including free school meals

Positives

- Significant co-ordinated effort from staff to get food to families in the early days – vouchers settled down eventually
- Greater awareness of family issues nationally
- The council did not use easement in the relevant Acts regarding social care and SEND unless absolutely necessary
- Partnerships worked well across the system

Challenges

- Concern that families not previously affected by job loss may now be
- There were early challenges accessing free school meal vouchers – later resolved
- Children in poor housing needed a particular close eye on them
- Possible increased likelihood of challenges for families going forward post Covid-19

Going forward

- Need to respond to predicted rise in referrals in autumn term
- Review health issues – mental health/obesity
- Council will have the opportunity to contribute to the National Care Review
- Many children in care and care leavers said they have had more time to be with their carers
- Need for even greater partnership working with health on mental health issues
- Strong positive – strengths of partnerships and ways of working

Questions

Member's views/thoughts on which aspects they would like to discuss in more detail at future meetings