

Keeping children safe during Covid – 19
Report from: Group Managers/ Sophie Wales



Executive summary

This paper summarises the response, to date, to COVID-19 by children’s services and wider partners. The paper outlines key actions that have been taken to keep children and young people safe during the unprecedented response to COVID-19. In addition, the paper identifies a number of positive changes to practice that should be sustained into the recovery phase of COVID-19.

- Key messages of action to keep children and young people safe
- Management of risk
- Key challenges
- Key successes
- What recovery phase(s) could look like

Nationally and locally the response required to COVID-19 has been unprecedented. The situation continues to be dynamic with an ever changing picture. It is certain that children’s services and partners will look to further strengthen contingency arrangements alongside national guidance continuing to develop at pace. The national landscape is far from settled and will continue to change. York’s response to the virus can be characterised at each stage by the requirements to:

- Keep children safe
- Keep staff safe
- Play our part in following national guidance to tackle the spread and impact of COVID-19

Background

Prior to COVID-19 York had been driving forward a broad range of improvement activity in relation to children’s services. This improvement plan was well established at the onset of COVID-19 and as such improvement activity has rightly continued during this time with a relentless focus on getting it right for children and families. In some cases the creative responses required have produced solutions that we would want to build on in any return to “normal” arrangements.

As the international and national picture developed existing Business Continuity Plans were reviewed and updated. The pace of the changes required has meant often local authorities have had to make key decisions in relation to changes in practice. Throughout its response York has worked on the basis of working to pre-existing guidance and standards and adapting these where essential.

Overview

Management Coordination

Throughout COVID-19 there has been visible, strong and coordinated leadership and management. Linking with emergency command structures of City of York Council and statutory partners, a coordinated transition to alternative working arrangements was achieved at great pace. This included providing clear guidance to staff on working remotely and establishing a COVID-19 plan for each child on caseload.

There have been strong and regular links between senior managers within children's services and CYC Public Health. This has meant that throughout each week children's services have been able to plan their response with access to the latest health information available and discuss directly any changes to working arrangements and clarify any changes in guidance to ensure practice remained up to date and current.

Managers have ensured that changes to statutory guidance as a result of COVID-19 is reviewed and implemented within the service. The service has taken the clear decision to work to pre-existing standards and adapt to any relaxation of statutory requirements where necessary to do so. Any deviation from guidance has been agreed with partner agencies where appropriate and signed off by the Director of Children's Services.

Very regular video and tele conferencing meetings between statutory safeguarding partners have been able to share information on the changing picture, share challenges, develop solutions and share best practice. This has ensured a coordinated response between statutory safeguarding partners.

Additional equipment requirements including ICT, communication and Personal Protective Equipment were quickly identified and prioritised through command structures.

Although clearly a challenging time the feedback from staff has been that they have valued the regular and clear communication from

managers. Feedback suggests this has not only helped staff in the delivery of their work but also in supporting the emotional and physical well-being of staff.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub

York introduced a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub in 2019 as part of its wider improvement journey. Contingency plans have now been implemented to allow the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub to continue to operate remotely. Practically this can be seen through:

- Equipment to allow phone calls to be managed remotely and ensure continuity of access to the Multi-Agency Hub.
- Coordination with multi-agency partners within the hub to ensure continued information sharing to inform timely decision making.
- Holding strategy meetings virtually has proved to be very effective.
- A review of staffing arrangements to ensure appropriate cover is in place.
- Consolidated advice and support on partner lead Family Early Help Assessments through the MASH. This replaces previous link arrangements in localities which would be vulnerable to staffing coverage being compromised. This change has had three positive effects. The first of which is to provide greater consistency to the advice and support to partners leading early help cases. The second benefit is the ability to more closely track progress of partner led FEHAs and identify more quickly any drift and delay. Finally this change has also enabled early help practitioners within Local Area Teams to focus more clearly on casework as opposed to also providing advice to other lead practitioners. Given these positive changes it would be sensible to sustain this new approach into any phase of recovery.
- Weekly meetings have been held with EDT to ensure continuity of service and to manage any anticipated increase in demand out of hours. The service has been able to flex to meet this demand.

Data has shown a reduction in referrals to the MASH following the onset of COVID-19. Additional communications continue to be shared through the safeguarding partnership to promote the identification of need and where required referrals for early help or social care. Statutory partners are reviewing the changes in demand and activity across agencies twice weekly.

COVID Response on open cases

The response to COVID-19 on open cases has been guided by the principles of *keeping children safe, keeping staff safe* and *following national guidance*. The reviewing of all cases open to early help and children's social care has been amended to reflect this. Key features of this include:

- All early help cases have moved to being worked remotely and with remote reviews and engagement with families. Resources have been developed using local, regional and national materials to ensure remote work with families continues to be purposeful and supports families to make progress. Staff have fed back that have valued the support they have received and are clear on how to work with families. All early help cases have been RAG rated in relation to the level of risk associated with them. This provides a more granular understanding of presenting risk and those that may need differing levels of support at this time. This more detailed understanding of risk supports the regular discussions that happen with children's social care and supports any cases where a referral is required.
- All cases open to children's social care were quickly RAG rated to establish a safe and proportionate approach to visiting. This means that as far as possible statutory visits are still undertaken and recorded as such. In cases where a statutory visit may not be possible alternative models of visiting are being undertaken through the use of phone calls and video calls / FaceTime. A number of creative examples of remote visits has been drawn together and good practice shared back to the service, with council leaders and partners.
- We have moved past the initial phase of responding to COVID-19 and are now strengthening remote working arrangements. A key next step as we move to "recovery" will be to review the current RAG rating and visiting plans for children to maximise face to face visits carried out in line with guidance. This will include moving to children only rag rated as red or green.
- Initial and review child protection conferences have continued to take place, during Covid this has been virtually. Processes have been reviewed for the distribution of reports and children and young people being able to take engage. Feedback from partners and families has been positive.

- Provision of overnight short breaks to the most vulnerable children have continued to take place to prevent family breakdown where possible. Community short breaks have been suspended as they cannot be safely delivered in line with government guidance and families offered remote support. The reintroduction of community short breaks will be considered as part of our recovery planning as will the learning from what different models of support have been effective during this period.
- Supervisions are taking place remotely making use of Skype. This allows for managers and staff to share screens and carry out reflective supervision remotely. Group reflective supervision have also been introduced remotely using Skype and has been well attended and received by staff.
- Schools are able to discuss any issues or concerns on open cases with social workers. Work to strengthen the overall reporting of attendance information is underway with colleagues within education.
- New minimum standards have been established for information to be recorded on all open cases. This has been shared by managers with all staff.
- Dip sampling of open cases is checking compliance with new arrangements outlined above and is showing a good level of compliance. Where any non-compliance is identified this is shared with the social worker and their manager to correct.
- A new dedicated team focused on addressing exploitation was due to go live when Covid broke. This team has still gone live in acknowledgement of children's heightened vulnerability during this time. This has brought together social workers into a small team that are able to take a more specialist lead on cases where exploitation is identified as a factor.
- The children in care council (Show Me That I Matter) is now meeting virtually using video conferencing. Consultation has also been undertaken with young people to provide advice to social workers about how to engage with them during this time.
- Pressures in the court team have continued to build in the absence of contested hearings taking place where we expect to see plans being developed to create certainty for children We have recruited additional capacity into this team.

- There have been highly creative examples of foster carers supporting non face to face contact with birth families.
- There has been a significant improvement in young people's engagement in their CYPIC reviews as they have preferred to engage in the process using social media.

Community response

There is a wealth of pre-existing community development and volunteer programmes aligned with early help and children's social care. Organisations commissioned by the Local Area Teams have adapted delivery in order to continue to operate and meet need in line with government guidance. Existing volunteer programmes such as young people's mentors, Trusted Relationships and Independent Visitors all continue to be delivered. In many cases work has been adapted in order to deliver these volunteer interventions remotely.

There has been a significant development of a range of community solutions in response to COVID-19. In many cases this has been developed within the community and by voluntary and community partners. A key feature of the response has been the development of community hubs that are being coordinated by the council. These hubs are supporting with the distribution of food and linking to support in the community. There has also been a significant number of people in the city that have registered with the council to act as volunteers (in excess of 4000). This increase in community action and volunteering has the potential to be sustained into any phase of recovery. In order to build on this momentum it would be necessary to understand more about those reached by community hubs and volunteers and what impact this has had.

Statutory Guidance through Covid-19

On 22nd March the DfE published comprehensive guidance to support vulnerable children and young people during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>

On 3rd April 2020 further DfE guidance was published specifically in relation to children's social care:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services>

Of particular note was the guidance in relation to vulnerable children attending educational settings unless they have underlying health conditions that put them at severe risk.

Within the guidance vulnerable children and young people are defined as those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan whose needs cannot be met safely in the home environment

The local authority have ensured compliance with DfE guidance to ensure risks to children, staff and partners are effectively overseen and managed (see Covid Guidance checklist below).

On the 24th April the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 were enacted. These regulations saw some relaxation of existing statutory guidance until 25th September when it is anticipated the Coronavirus Act 2020 will be reviewed.

The majority of the amendments are designed to relax strict timescales and replace them, where appropriate, by a requirement that if the timescales cannot be met, they should be met as soon as reasonably practicable. Other major amendments are the removal of the obligation to refer cases to adoption or fostering panels, the removal of the definition of connected persons from the temporary approval of foster carers, and the extension of emergency placement of children with foster carers outside their terms of approval from six days to 24 weeks.

City of York Council is clear however that we will continue to operate in line with usual legal practices. Relaxation of existing statutory processes will only take place in exceptional circumstances. In these circumstances this would be a decision taken on an individual case basis and formally recorded as a senior management decision with an outline of why doing so would be in the best interests of the child.

Coronavirus (Covid-19): checklist against guidance

Ensuring Risk management Covid 19	Action	Evidence
Protection of work force	<p>Overall risk assessment to minimise physical contact between social workers and children and families where it is safe to do so</p> <p>Reduce contact in the work place</p>	<p>PPE is provided to all workers having direct contact with children and families</p> <p>Overarching risk assessment has been done to rag rate against children in order to both ensure the most vulnerable children are seen and to reduce risk to the workforce where possible</p> <p>Workforce are agile working</p> <p>Business continuity plans updated and activated</p>
Managerial Guidance	Put system in place to ensure social workers and managers have access to	All Social workers have access to Managerial Guidance through cell phones and emails, recording on files
Social Work Supervision	Put in place provision for remote supervision to take place	Skype is in place and all workers have access to an account
Changes to Statutory guidance regulations	Ensure process in place to keep workforce informed of changes to Statutory Guidance	<p>Changes of all Statutory Guidance has been distributed and implemented where appropriate by Group Managers - The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.</p> <p>Coronavirus Act 2020 – notices to temporarily remove or relax statutory requirements in education and child care.</p> <p>All guidance on social distance etc shared and implemented in practice where possible.</p>

Ensuring Risk management Covid 19	Action	Evidence
How do we know children are safe? Visits	All Children have been reviewed and have been rag rated Ensure updated Case Summary on each file explaining visiting rule for the specific child	Rag Rated excel sheet that has AD oversight Case Summary on all children's files that shows rag rating and these are being reviewed and updated continuously
	Ensure Children who are more at risk are visited/contacted more frequently	Rag Rated Spread sheet implemented cross referencing with KPI report on stat visits
	Statutory Visit taking place where possible	KPI Machine – stat visit report Child's individual record
	Ensure recording on non-statutory visits are taking place social work satisfies themselves that child is safe by undertaking other form of contact.	Recorded as Covid 19 Visit KPI Machine QA Process Clarification on recording visits to CIN, CY and CYPIC cases disseminated.  1. Clarification on recording Visits to o
Children and young people assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child.	Ensure these children and young people are encouraged to attend provision, unless their social worker decides that they are at less risk at home or in their placement, for example, due to underlying health conditions. Complete fuller assessment on all children, consistently revisit: Balance Risk to child or others against Social Work contact with child. Child in/out of school Parenting capacity Risk to breakdown within the family home or placement.	Confirmation from managers that they are satisfied that all children in their teams have been assessed and there are processes in place to review Template/guidance sent to Social Workers checks via QA process Children are safe, escalation is taking place where required Dip sampling of files
Children on EHCP	Social Worker to work with educational providers, families and the child or young person to carry out a risk assessment to judge	All children with an EHCP who are open to a social workers have been rag rated for visiting.

Ensuring Risk management Covid 19	Action	Evidence
Completion and reviews of EHCP	<p>whether the child or young person's needs cannot be met safely at home</p> <p>Where the risk assessment determines a child or young person with an EHC plan will be safer at home, they stay at home. Where the risk assessment determines a child or young person with an EHC plan will be as safe or safer at an education setting, our recommendation is that they attend the education setting</p> <p>Flexibility has been provided – read the changes to regulations during Covid 19</p>	<p>Confirmation from managers that they are satisfied that all children in their teams have been assessed and there are processes in place to review.</p> <p>Template/guidance sent to Social Workers checks via QA process</p> <p>Children are safe, escalation is taking place where required.</p> <p>Dip sampling of files</p>
	<p>Put a system in place with schools to ensure that there is strategic oversight of any vulnerable children who should be in school and not attending.</p> <p>Provide flow chart and procedure to social workers and school colleagues; explaining what they need to do</p> <p>If access to child denied, ensure there are processes in place to escalate concerns</p>	<p>Information provided to DfE</p> <p>This is the flow chart and procedure is in place and agreed with education</p> <p>Usual processes are in place albeit not always face to face</p>
	Information sharing process in place with all schools and children social care to monitor school attendance	
Children with EHCP	Highlight on strategic oversight report	Process in place with school
Personal Budget child with EHCP	Continue to provide respite and short breaks where possible and make alternative arrangements with family if not possible	Process in place with H&D team that has been adapted to accommodate the Covid 19 guidance
Diverting from standard practice	If there is a needs to divert from standard practice ensure there is a clear and concise record on the child's file	Managerial rationale required on child's file – check via audit/dip sample

Ensuring Risk management Covid 19	Action	Evidence
MASH	Ensure process in place to allow Multiagency assessments to take place	Daily conference calls with partners A.M which considers all new referrals and information received. Remote working arrangements in place using technology. New information sharing tool implemented that is fit for purpose.
Assessments	Ensure Statutory assessments are taking place and children are safe	Child been seen and rag rated to prioritise. Technology used to adapted visit where appropriate Increased managerial oversight. Remote working in place regarding partner agencies
Strategy Discussion	Ensure Strategy discussions are taking place.	Conference calls in place – improved attendance. Child Protection Medicals taking place and planning completed in Strategy discussion in line with Covid Guidance
S47 Investigation	Ensure measures are in place to ensure safety of child/ren	We have not diverted from usual practice regarding initial visit. Risk assessment completed, regarding further visits to gather information.
ICPC	Ensure remote working arrangements in place; Skype	Skype meetings taking place and process in place for distribution of reports and feedback children's views etc. Auditory audits to take place to ensure safe practice
CIN Plan	Ensure process are in place to allow remote working arrangements in place	Meetings held via Skype
CP Plan		Minutes on children's file
CYPIC Plan		QA process
Pathway Plan		
Conference Reviews	Ensure remote working arrangements and process are in place	Conference reviews are being done remotely via Skype.

Annex 5 Report to Improvement Board – May 2020

Ensuring Risk management Covid 19	Action	Evidence
		<p>Process in place regarding distribution of reports and feedback</p> <p>Auditory audits to take place to ensure safe and effective practice</p>
CYPIC Reviews	Ensure remote working arrangements and process in place	<p>Children in Care Reviews are being done remotely via Skype.</p> <p>Process in place regarding distribution of reports and feedback</p> <p>Auditory audits to take place to ensure safe and effective practice</p>
Contact arrangements for children in care – expectation is contact goes ahead in the spirit of any order	<p>Each child’s contact arrangements to be assessed individually and contact plan to be put in place and shared with parents and carers.</p> <p>Contact to take place as usual with social distancing guidance being adhered to</p>	<p>Guidance on contact is amended to read the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact should be reviewed on a case by case basis depended on the needs of the child and plan, i.e. ensuring contact is undertaken in the spirit of any order in place whilst applying social distancing • Managers direction and oversight must be recorded on each child’s file in relation to contact plans
Health Assessments and Health Reviews	to continue to the best of our ability	Health have sent out guidance to social workers regarding verbal consent
Personal Educational Plans	Virtual Head to put system in place to ensure PEPS are taking place	<p>PEP under Covid-19, Guidance distributed</p>  <p>2. PEP guidance for COVID 19.pdf</p>
Placing children in care when they are symptomatic of Covid 19	Ensure a process is in place to manage the accommodation of a child who is symptomatic of Covid-19	Each child assessed under its own merit

Ensuring Risk management Covid 19	Action	Evidence
Unaccompanied asylum seeking child arrives in England and is symptomatic of coronavirus (COVID-19)	Local Authority is still responsible for the child Place in provision where they are isolate from others in line with PHE self-isolation guidance	Each child assessed under its own merit Provision in place through S.A.S.H
Care Leavers	Treat as all other vulnerable children	Confirmation from managers that they are satisfied that all children in their teams have been assessed and there are processes in place to review. Template/guidance sent to social work manager and PA's Checks via QA process Children are safe, escalation is taking place where required. Dip sampling of files
Care Leavers, moving out of current placements	Additional Funding has been provided for Care Leavers to remain with their current provider.	Local arrangements are in place to ensure no care leaver has had to move placement or leave care during this time. Local arrangements are in place to draw down funding that has been made available to support care leavers.
Care Leavers Transitioning into independent living	A decision to move a child is at the discretion of the LA and in the best interest of the young person	
Care Leavers extra provision for essentials	Government funding need to know how to access this	Local arrangements are in place to draw down funding that has been made available to support care leavers.

Ensuring Risk management Covid 19	Action	Evidence
Private Fostering	Changes to legislation for Covid period	DfE guidance distributed to all service areas - The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.
placement of children in unregistered settings	No change – all children must be placed in registered children’s homes, unregulated can continue as usual practice. If a child is placed in an unregistered setting follow usual procedure for escalation to DCS and notifying Ofsted.	Usual process
Information Sharing	Ensure Data is shared securely: The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 do not prevent, or limit, the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe.	Legal advice sought if unsure about sharing data.
Ensuring Multiagency support continues	Remote working is in place across all agencies	CAMHS: Ongoing arrangements in place to support contact remotely with video conferencing with families. Education: welfare staff are visiting vulnerable children at home in discussion with early help and children’s social care
Alternative Education provision	Plans to wrap service around any children who attend this provision where provision is closed – same as school holiday provision	Danesgate continues to provide education for children A selection of children are receiving targeted support in the setting to support education
Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel notification	LA Continue to notify within 5 working days – portal is open 24 hours	As normal
Safeguarding Partnership Rapid Reviews	Requires local decision	
In depth Practice Review	Accepted may take longer than 6 month – inform mailbox.cpod@education.gov.uk mailbox.NationalReviewPanel@education.gov.uk	

Ensuring Risk management Covid 19	Action	Evidence
Courts	Guidance on moving towards delivering remote hearings Contact Legal department for Local arrangements	Contact legal for local arrangements
Fostering	Regulations have been relaxed	The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. Distributed and implemented where required Sufficiency Strategy reviewed and additional foster placements secured
Foster carers in the vulnerable group and children attending education		In discussion between Virtual Head, social worker, Foster carer and child - agree how child's educational needs can be best met and implemented
Adoption	Regulations have been relaxed COVID 19	Each case to be assessed individually and action taken – case by case risk decision to be made
Introductions between children and prospective adopters		Each child's plan is assessed individually and decisions made accordingly in the best interest of the child
Regional Adoption Agencies	Put plans in place to use technology to allow adoption process to continue	
Adoption Panels	Put in place remote panels and use technology to allow adoption process to continue – there is an acceptance that there will be delays	
DBS and medicals for perspective adopters	Common Sense, risk based approach to move to stage 2 as long as LA, and carers wish to do so; checks must be completed by the end of stage 2	
Transport	Review arrangements for those children who are transported to school and put in place appropriate measures to allow children	Children are being transported to school by taxi as required, with a risk assessment and adherence to social distancing as appropriate

Ensuring Risk management Covid 19	Action	Evidence
	to be transported to school safely. There is an expectation that children where necessarily will still be transported.	
OFSTED	Routine inspections suspended	Business as usual
	OFSTED will respond to immediate concerns raised regarding the safety of children	
DFE support advisors and Commissioners available	Director will request support from DFE if required.	

Other useful information:

- [Guidance for schools about temporarily closing](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) guidance on vulnerable children and young people](#)
- [Information for social workers from Social Work England](#)
- [Social distancing](#)
- [Public Health England \(PHE\) guidance](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children](#). Escalate as previously CP concerns
- [Social distancing for everyone in the UK and protecting older people and vulnerable adults](#) and [shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable](#)
- [Maintaining education provision](#)
- [Safeguarding in schools, colleges and other providers](#)
- [Seeping children safe in education](#)
- Other guidance for [schools](#) and [parents](#) to support all children.
- 9:95 to 9:124 of the [SEND code of practice](#)
- Coronavirus Act 2020 – Notices to temporarily remove or relax statutory requirements in education and childcare
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/id/uksi/2020/471>

Addendum: Keeping children safe during Covid – 19



July 2020

Improving further and next steps

The challenge of responding to COVID-19 has been unprecedented and continues to develop. The response has been characterised by staff going above and beyond to make what was before ‘impossible’ now ‘possible’. There are clearly some aspects of remote working which can already be identified as proving to be more beneficial than previous ways of working, for children, families, partners and staff.

The landscape remains dynamic and there is further opportunity to strengthen remote ways of working as we move into the first phase of recovery.

The development of a recovery plan will capture all of the operational benefits that we now need to take forward as we move into a new norm.

MASH

There has been a recent increase in contacts and referrals to MASH, with a 46% overall increase in demand for Early Help as lockdown has eased (16/03 to 10/05 compared to 11/05 to 03/07). Demand is being closely monitored. Additional temporary capacity has been created in MASH Early Help which is proving to be effective, the majority of contacts and referrals are from police and wider family seeking support for children and young people. There is no need at present to increase social work capacity as caseloads are manageable and assessment timeliness is improving.

Contact with Families

All children had been risk rated red, amber or green in relation to face to face or virtual contact. As lockdown easing was announced a clear mandate was issued to social workers that all children should be seen face to face if risk assessment allows (i.e. there are no covid symptoms in the family) If a family are self-isolating on line and telephone contact are used until a visit is possible and a risk assessment may be completed by the social worker depending on the nature of the case. The vast majority of our children are now being seen face to face.

Community Short Breaks

CSB's are being restarted for children that are eligible. All CSB's are risk assessed and a plan put in place that protects the worker and child. The risk assessment included appropriate use of PPE and additional hand sanitising, and included distancing as required/able. CSB are using outdoor venues where possible, to reduce social contact and increase fresh air. Under the risk assessment, public transport is not being used.

Engagement with Schools

Partnerships with schools have improved during Covid with good joint work in place. Discussions with schools are being held at times that suit both the school and other professionals, the majority of these are during the school day. Regular meetings with schools continue virtually and are informing plans for new ways of working in children's services.

Show Me That I Matter (Children in Care Council)

Virtual SMTIM meetings have worked well as regular engagement with the group has been able to continue and remain effective.

Numbers engaging, particularly for I Still Matter have dropped slightly although the meetings have been more productive and more has been covered than face-to-face meetings. Going forward the proposal will be for a combined approach with some meetings being face to face and some virtual.

Certainty for children

At the outset of lockdown changes to the way court were operating and especially contested hearings have created a delay for some children. Hearings have now started to take place meaning that plans for children can be finalised. This is in relation specifically to contested hearings where parents are not in agreement with the local authority plan, particularly in relation to adoption. Now that hearings are starting to take place plans for permanence for children can be finalised, i.e. adoption or a planned supported return to parents.

Engagement of children and young people during and after recovery

Children, young people and families have largely engaged well virtually as required. There is evidence to suggest some children and young people are reducing that engagement and as such a blended mix of virtual and face to face will be planned during and post-recovery. For larger meetings public health guidance means that meetings will

continue virtually for some time. Social workers have shared excellent examples of the creative ways in which they have engaged children and families during this time. Measures have been put in place to support children and young people and care leavers to engage virtually, for example, lap tops have been issued.

Sophie Wales

Assistant Director

Children's Services