

Report of the Director of Children and Families
Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Date: 9th September 2020

Subject: Coronavirus (COVID19) pandemic – Response and Recovery Plan



Are specific electoral wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
If yes, name(s) of ward(s):		
Has consultation been carried out?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
If relevant, access to information procedure rule number:		
Appendix number:		

Summary

1. Main issues

- **Children and Families Leadership Team** has continued to communicate regularly and proactively with staff at all levels and with key stakeholders in order to identify and address emerging Covid-19 related issues in the most timely and effective manner. The leadership team has issued and revised a range of Covid-19 related guidance for staff, parents, carers and foster carers to provide clarity and leadership in unprecedented times.
- **Social Care** – all statutory services have been maintained throughout the pandemic as well as much needed Early Help and preventative support. Referrals to the Children and Families Duty and Advice service have slowly increased with an average of 500 contacts a week, so on par with contact levels pre pandemic. There has not been the decrease in referrals during the school holidays that would normally occur. There are some core themes which include: domestic violence and abuse, increased referrals from neighbours regarding anti-social behaviour, concerns for children’s welfare, parental conflict, particularly where parents are in private proceedings and increased referrals from the Police regarding teenagers and challenging behaviour. An increase in referrals is predicted when schools return and work is ongoing with key partners to develop contingency plans to manage this.

- The Local Authority's **children's residential homes** have continued to manage the challenges of the pandemic well through routinely arranged testing for staff and children. There continues to have been only 1 case of a young person in the Local Authority's residential children's homes having tested positive since the start of the pandemic. The homes have remained fully staffed with the support of colleagues from across the directorate.
- Further to the announcement to close schools, **early years** providers and further education establishments for all but the most vulnerable children and children of specific key workers, the decision was made that, as from Monday 23rd March 2020, 13 out of the 29 Little Owls settings would remain open as the named hub sites, serving the Little Owls sites which would close. Based on local intelligence (staff availability and demand for childcare as well as geographical accessibility) it was decided that this would be the best way in which to ensure service continuity. The situation was reviewed on an on-going basis and in June, as some restrictions were lifted, a further 3 sites were reopened, taking the total number of hub sites open to 16.
- There has been extensive positive partnership work between the Children and Families directorate and schools across the city. When **schools** re-opened for certain year groups in June, parents could choose whether they wanted their child to attend. However, when schools re-open to pupils in September, all children and young people have to attend. Schools have completed comprehensive risk assessments so that they can re-open as safely as possible to all children in September.

2. Best Council Plan Implications

- The Best Council Plan (BCP) agreed at February's Full Council has been amended to ensure that the current COVID context is captured, in so far as is possible given the continued uncertainty. This version has now been published and can be found here - <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/BCP%202020-2025.PDF>
- Within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the vulnerabilities of children and families across the city has inevitably increased. In addition, many families not previously experiencing significant challenges to their health or finances, now find themselves in unfamiliar and concerning situations.
- Children and Families Services, therefore, finds itself under additional pressure in pursuit of achieving all of the goals set out in the Best Council Plan and continues to adapt and work flexibly as the challenges brought on by the pandemic have changed rapidly.

3. Resource Implications

- The Covid-19 pandemic is unprecedented and as such, Children and Families has had to redeploy resources to areas of need with the highest priority.
- The risk of infection to the workforce, particularly to front line staff and vulnerable staff (some of whom are shielding), has been significant, placing additional pressure on the directorate as the needs of vulnerable children and families across the city rises.

4. Recommendations

- The Scrutiny Board is asked to consider the information regarding the Children and Families Directorate's Covid-19 response and continuity planning presented in this report and determine whether there are any particular issues or areas it would like to focus on in more detail as part of its work schedule this year.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1. The Council's Chief Executive provided a comprehensive update report to the Executive Board during its meeting on 20th July 2020 on developments surrounding the Council's Response and Recovery Plan.
- 1.2. This report provides the Scrutiny Board with an update of the ongoing progress made by Children and Families Services, working with partners and communities, in response to the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Background information

- 2.1. The initial governance and delivery structure to drive the response to the coronavirus outbreak, including an initial Response and Recovery Plan, was considered by the Executive Board in March 2020. A further update report by the Chief Executive, which included an updated version of the Response and Recovery Plan, was then reported to the Executive Board during its first public remote meeting held on 22nd April 2020 ([Link to Executive Board meeting agenda 22-04-20](#)).
- 2.2. During April, arrangements were put in place for each of the Council's Scrutiny Board Chairs to receive regular briefings from their respective Lead Directors and Executive Members to review the Covid-19 response. During May, these arrangements were extended so that, on a fortnightly basis, all Scrutiny Board Members were also being engaged (as part of a remote working group) in those briefings.
- 2.3. The Scrutiny Board held a further working group meeting on 17th June 2020 to consider the update report of the Chief Executive on the Council's Response and Recovery Plan which was reported to the Executive Board on 19th May 2020 ([Link to Executive Board meeting agenda 24-06-20](#)). During this meeting, the Board was also briefed on the latest position with regard to those service areas that fall within the remit of the Children and Families Scrutiny Board, including Schools, Early Years/Childcare Provision, Children Social Care and Children's Homes.
- 2.4. As part of its public remote meeting, on 8th July 2020, the Children and Families Scrutiny Board continued to focus its attention on how the Council and its partners are working collaboratively to support all children and their families especially the most vulnerable during such an unprecedented and difficult period.

3. Main issues

- 3.1. Updates have been provided by the following service areas which fall within the remit of the Children and Families Scrutiny Board:
 - Children's Homes
 - Children's Social Care / Early Help
 - Early Years / Childcare Provision
 - Schools
 - Shielding

3.2. Children's Homes

- 3.2.1 The Local Authority's children's residential homes have continued to manage the challenges of the pandemic well through routinely arranged testing for staff and children in the estate. Scrutiny Board members may be aware that, very tragically,

residential services lost a member of staff to Covid-19 who became unwell and passed away at home whilst isolating in April. This clearly had a significant impact on staff and young people within homes and the support shown and resilience demonstrated across the service has been tremendous. There continues to have been only 1 case of a young person in the Local Authority's residential estate having tested positive since the start of the pandemic.

- 3.2.2 All Local Authority homes are adequately equipped with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and have direct access through the government's programme of support to the sector, as well as fast access through arrangements within Leeds City Council.
- 3.2.3 Independent scrutiny considering the quality of homes provision has continued throughout the pandemic both virtually and, within the last two months, through on-site visits to the homes from independent visitors reporting directly to Ofsted.
- 3.2.4 Staffing levels have been maintained through the deployment of suitably skilled and trained Youth and Youth Justice Staff and the recruitment of casual staff where the Council has experienced reduced staffing levels due to shielding. This has included recruiting Social Work students on placement and newly qualified Social Workers.
- 3.2.5 Plans are in place to ensure that the Council maintains effective staffing levels to support the continued essential work of its homes. Residential Children's Services continue to monitor all additional cost pressures associated with safe management in this time. The service remains vigilant to the potential to have to manage the impact of groups of staff within homes having to self-isolate as a result of track and trace guidelines. The service is prepared that in the event that a child or member of staff within the homes test positive then staff within the home will isolate effectively as a single household.
- 3.2.6 Since the last report to the Scrutiny Board, children's residential homes have continued to work well with support from the Youth Service and Youth Justice Service; whilst continuing the process of risk assessing staff who have been isolating, to ensure that they are safely able to return to work in homes. The process of managing our Youth Service and Youth Justice Service staff's return to their substantive roles is being carefully managed to ensure that we maintain effective cover in our homes as staff return to substantive roles and new staff are appointed.
- 3.2.7 The Local Authority has had no further confirmed instances of young people or staff within the residential estate having contracted Covid-19 since May 2020. Managers and staff in Local Authority homes remain vigilant to enforcing safe practices, restricting unnecessary visits to the home, and accessing tests for staff and young people where there are any suspected symptoms.
- 3.2.8 Colleagues continue to work alongside Health and Safety, Human Resources and Occupational Health to ensure that homes are effectively advised, and act on changes in guidance. Work also continues with colleagues in the Trade Unions to ensure that communication and reassurance is effective.
- 3.2.9 Risk assessments:
- 3.2.10 With the support of LCC's Health and Safety team, the service has regularly reviewed and, where required, updated each home's individual risk assessment and safe operating plans. Risk assessments were most recently updated on 10th August and the revised business continuity plan for Adel Beck secure children's home

(which provides a national resource) was reviewed and updated on 13th August. These are subject to continual review by the service managers responsible for these provisions.

3.2.11 Occupancy rates:

3.2.12 The Local Authority's community homes are currently providing care and support for 24 young people (excluding Rainbow House and Adel Beck). The service has continued to identify and match young people who require residential group living, to our homes. Where appropriate to do so, the service also continues to support reunification plans or moves to family living for children in our homes. Current occupancy across the Council's homes (excluding Rainbow House and Adel Beck) is 83% of the total capacity. All new referrals are subject to assessment and planning, which includes safe working practices relating to Covid-19 guidance. Arrangements are now in place to open a further home at Cranmer bank LS17, which will provide additional capacity to support children and young people who require residential care whilst being supported to return home.

3.2.13 The performance and management of the Local Authority's children's residential estate continues to be reported to Elected Members at the Corporate Parenting Board.

3.3. **Children's Social Care / Early Help**

3.3.1 Children and Families Services continues to place an emphasis on the need for increased communication between colleagues at all levels, taking a proactive approach to identifying and responding to emerging Covid-19 issues.

3.3.2 Regular forums with a cross section of managers and front-line staff have created valuable space for horizon scanning, creative thinking and problem solving which has promoted a culture of dispersed leadership.

3.3.3 Weekly meetings are held with union colleagues to ensure a proactive approach to identifying and addressing emerging issues which has been extremely effective.

3.3.4 The Senior Leadership Team has issued and revised a range of Covid-19 related guidance for staff, parents, carers, foster carers to provide clarity and leadership.

3.3.5 Senior managers have positively engaged with the workforce and other key stakeholders to deploy staff flexibly in order to continue to deliver a number of critical services including Duty and Advice and the Emergency Duty Team. Light Bite refresher training and additional development sessions were put in place to support individuals to work flexibly when required and this has been very well received.

3.3.6 In addition to redeploying staff from the youth service to residential children's homes; managers have worked with HR colleagues to identify individuals in other directorates who have the qualifications and experience to support some of our critical services should this be required. Retired staff have also been approached and provided with casual contracts of employment to enable the service to respond in a timely way to any staffing pressures.

3.3.7 Referrals to the Children and Families Duty and Advice service have slowly increased with an average of 500 contacts a week, so on par with contact levels pre pandemic. There have not been the decrease in referrals during the school holidays

that would normally occur. There are some core themes which include domestic violence and abuse, increased referrals from neighbours regarding anti-social behaviour, concerns for children's welfare, parental conflict particularly where parents are in private proceeding and increased referrals from the Police regarding teenagers and challenging behaviour. An increase in referrals is predicted when schools return and work is ongoing with key partners to develop contingency plans to manage this.

- 3.3.8 Foster Carers have provided remarkable support to children and young people despite the unique challenges posed by Covid-19. There has been an increase in placement stability as carers have gone above and beyond to support the children in their care. The directorate has also seen an increase in the number of individuals expressing an interest in becoming a Foster Carer and this is being actively progressed with an ongoing focus on attracting BAME Foster Carers.
- 3.3.9 The local Reducing Parental Conflict Programme in Leeds, has provided training to professionals across the city to support families with this issue. A new website called Relationships Matter has been established across 14 local authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside including Leeds which provides information, advice and resources to families where parental conflict is an issue. Data collected shows that the website is attracting a good level of interest from parents/carers in Leeds.
- 3.3.10 Multi Agency Safeguarding Response Teams established to provide additional face to face visits to children and families during the pandemic where there were ongoing child protection concerns have worked well. Health colleagues, family outreach workers, Early Help practitioners and family support staff sit within the teams.
- 3.3.11 Children and Families staff have worked effectively with multi agency partners at a Cluster level to continue to identify the most vulnerable children and families, ensuring a clear line of sight on the child and robust individual support plans. This has included ensuring families are not missed where they are not subject to Child in Need or Child Protection plans, but may be on the edge of coping and made more vulnerable by the pandemic and lockdown.
- 3.3.12 Children and Families Covid-19 Bronze Groups have been established in the East, South and West of the city and continue to work well. They are well attended with significant multi-agency representation including schools, health, Police and voluntary sector partners. They provide a good forum for looking at any specific needs across the locality and ensuring our most vulnerable children are supported. The successful partnerships that Clusters have with schools has come into its own during the pandemic and has been critical in ensuring the provision of effective support to the most vulnerable children. This has included daily visits, food parcels, activity packs and ensuring children have school work. More recently the meetings have focussed on the return to school and how we support children and families back into education. The provision of practical support, such as food parcels, has supported engagement with families who may not have previously sought early help.
- 3.3.13 The directorate continues to develop its use of technology and this has seen an increase in participation by some young people and their parents/carers. Family Group Conferences have been held virtually and initial feedback has been positive.
- 3.3.14 Laptops and tablets have been provided to vulnerable children across the city through a DfE initiative to support young people's education.

- 3.3.15 The Early Help Hubs have had a key role in the city wide food network and built positive relationships with the third sector and communities. They have delivered over 3,000 food parcels, many to children on child protection plans and child in need plans. Recently, East Early Help Hub joined their foodbank with CATCH in Harehills, and this has strengthened partnership working. The delivery of food parcels has been a key priority for the hubs and has driven partnership working across the Council and forged new ways of working. This has been supported by other early help services and volunteers.
- 3.3.16 Linking in with the healthy holidays programme has also been a key priority in addition to supporting those families shielding and in general vulnerable groups. During the pandemic the hubs have flexed their offer to be much broader and rooted in the community and provided the glue across the locality.
- 3.3.17 Families First is working jointly with Hamara to support the delivery of culturally appropriate food across the city and support care leavers and other vulnerable groups. More recently the service has received £50,000 from the Defra funding and is using this to further develop the work in communities. Families First have worked in partnership with Leeds Baby Bank to help address Covid-19 related capacity issues and to ensure the ongoing delivery of essential provisions. Positive relationships have been developed with health colleagues and new pathways have been agreed to support this work.
- 3.3.18 The multi-disciplinary make-up of the hubs has been expanded with education psychologists spending one day per week in each hub base, building closer links with education and an integrated response to children with more complex needs.
- 3.3.19 The hubs have worked closely with schools who have not been part of the Cluster arrangements. Some schools have chosen to remain within their Cluster despite plans being made to the contrary pre-pandemic and some schools who had previously left their Cluster arrangements have expressed an intention to return.
- 3.3.20 Police colleagues who were initially pulled back into more traditional policing roles are now back in the hubs and working closely with early help practitioners and other key partners.
- 3.3.21 There has been an increase in demand from families for support around Welfare Benefits and this is being provided through the hubs.
- 3.3.22 The domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health specialists based in each hub continue to provide information, advice and support to professionals and families.
- 3.3.23 The Early Help Hubs have worked with the Restorative Early Support Teams to support families whose children have been in-patients at the LGI's regional specialist unit. Help has been given with regard to essential items, laundry and emotional support.
- 3.3.24 Learning Points (from the Early Help Hubs):
- Teams within the Early Help Service must make more of shared use of locations across the Council, and be far more fluid and flexible with work spaces.
 - There needs to be increased engagement with grass roots organisations and building trust and capacity through working with community leaders.

- There needs to be continued increased joint working across the Council on key issues such as poverty, welfare issues, employment and skills and targeted work.
- Practical support is key and can often break down barriers and help build trust.
- There is a need to fully utilise the skills in the community and prioritise asset based approaches, building on recent developments such as the Empowering Parents Empowering Communities parenting programme.
- There is a need to widen the reach of Early Help services to support more digital inclusion for those who don't have access.
- There is a need to examine Digital Inclusion as one way of engaging families as, in some instances, this is less threatening for families.
- There is a need to think differently about how work and teams are organised and the use of digital approaches.
- There is need for teams to be prepared to give up some control in favour of more collaborative working.
- There is a need for the Council and Early Help services to be visible and support a cultural shift so as to be seen as a helpful organisation/services.

3.3.25 Triple P evidence based parenting programme is now being delivered online to parents and carers and has been well received.

3.3.26 There has been an integrated proactive response by the Youth Service, Neighbourhood Police and Early Help Practitioners to address the issue of adolescents gathering in localities and not adhering to social distancing and this work continues.

3.3.27 Practitioners have been mindful of the negative social, emotional and mental health impact that the pandemic has had on children, young people, parents and carers and a range of multi-disciplinary support is being provided in this area.

3.3.28 The Directorate is very mindful of its duty of care to the workforce as well as children and families. All members of staff have had a 'well-being' discussion with their line manager to ensure that they are receiving the individual support that they need.

3.3.29 Forums have been established with staff to share best practice in regard to promoting and sustaining positive well-being and a number of creative ideas have been progressed.

3.3.30 Discussions have taken place with staff at all levels following emerging evidence about the impact of Covid-19 on particular groups, the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. This has created valuable space to focus on and hear about the particular experience of BAME colleagues and vulnerable groups and to work together to ensure that colleagues feel valued, listened to and supported.

3.3.31 More staff are now working at least part of their week in an office base whether as a result of the needs of the service or the needs of individual staff members. Robust

risk assessments are in place and staff are still being encouraged to work at home where it is appropriate to do so.

3.4. **Early Years / Childcare Provision**

- 3.4.1 Further to the announcement to close schools, Early Years providers and Further Education establishments for all but the most vulnerable children and children of specific key workers, the decision was made that, as from Monday 23rd March 2020, 13 out of the 29 Little Owls settings would remain open as the named hub sites, serving the Little Owls sites which would close. Based on local intelligence (staff availability and demand for childcare as well as geographical accessibility) it was decided that this would be the best way in which to ensure service continuity. The situation was reviewed on an on-going basis and in June, as some restrictions were lifted, a further 3 sites were reopened, taking the total number of hub sites open to 16.
- 3.4.2 Following the latest government guidance, a number of new ways of operating were developed and implemented to ensure a range of protective measures for each site were put in place. This included risk assessing each building, as well as completing individual risk assessments for staff who were deemed to be clinically vulnerable, and for children with EHC plans. This allowed sites to increase numbers of children as safely as possible, focusing on measures that would help limit the risk of Covid-19 transmitting within settings.
- 3.4.3 A protocol has been developed for re-location of services which includes communication to parents & staff, safe transfer of files containing sensitive information, payment of fees and strategies for on-going engagement with the most vulnerable families.
- 3.4.4 With support from the Children's Centre Teacher Team and reflecting on the learning from Denmark, assessments and plans were made in order to determine how high quality, early learning and care could be offered safely. This included building on existing, safe, good quality practice and on emerging evidence. Planning for children was adapted to be responsive in nature and resources, such as malleable play, being adapted to ensure that it can be safely managed. There was a need to consider groupings, environment, ratios, equipment, ventilation, use of outdoors, hygiene measures and appropriate use of personal protective equipment.
- 3.4.5 The organisation and deployment of staff had to be managed in such a way as to minimise social contact, and to incorporate enhanced cleaning regimes within the day to day routine. In some instances, staff have been relocated to alternative settings to reduce the need to travel on public transport. Systems have been put in place to monitor daily on the number of children attending, as well as the weekly monitoring of staff transitioning in and out of self-isolation and shielding to ensure that staff: child ratios and bubble arrangements can be maintained. As well as staff shielding, the closure of schools meant that it was necessary to support staff to work from home, ensuring that the required IT equipment was in place to enable them to do this. Teams within the service have embraced the opportunity that working from home has offered to further enhance the continuous professional development of staff and a range of e-learning has been completed by our workforce.
- 3.4.6 Working closely with the children's centre family services teams, a weekly recording system has also been introduced to monitor the number and type of contacts taking place with those families who are deemed vulnerable.

- 3.4.7 In addition to supporting existing keyworker & vulnerable families, the Local Authority has offered places to 12 new families whose existing childcare had broken down i.e. due to the changing circumstances of family members or the closure of private settings; some of these families have indicated that they would like to remain in these new settings as restrictions are lifted.
- 3.4.8 The graphs in Appendix 1 illustrate the number of children and number of families supported during the lockdown period along with the numbers of children subject to child protection, or with SEND.
- 3.4.9 The service has deployed a portion of its staff resource elsewhere outside of the service, which has enhanced partnership working. 10 Members of staff volunteered to support the 3 Leeds teaching Hospital Trust nurseries for a number of weeks, and 11 members of staff volunteered to be on site to act as the named paediatric first aider in a number of primary schools.
- 3.4.10 Learning Points
- 3.4.11 At a time of such unprecedented challenge, effective communication is key and it has been the Local Authority's priority to ensure children, families & staff teams are kept informed of changes, feel supported and do not become isolated. This has included:
- Daily leadership meetings, which included the Head of Service (Learning for Life), allowing time to effectively navigate quickly changing guidance.
 - Regular letters and telephone contact for parents to keep them updated, to offer ongoing support and signposting, and to ensure continued engagement with the most vulnerable families.
 - Doorstep contact to deliver essential supplies and home learning packs.
 - Regular bulletins (initially sent out daily & now reduced to twice weekly) to staff and trade unions, with key updates and information to support mental health and well-being, and minimise anxiety.
 - Increased use of digital platforms such as Skype, Facebook and Tapestry to hold meetings remotely, deliver home learning activities, parenting programmes, share virtual tours of Local Authority settings and increase parental engagement. The creativity shown by Council staff has been incredible and really something to celebrate. The Early Help Service is working with colleagues from the School of languages, cultures & societies at the University of Leeds to produce an article for Nursery World on how technology has benefited parental engagement with early years' education through the lockdown.
 - Regular Zoom meetings have been held with the Executive Member for Children and Families, senior early years' staff and providers to share learning and support providers in implementing the guidance for safe practice. There have, also, been regular bronze meetings focussing on childminders, group settings and wrap around care. These have been invaluable and will continue as settings move into fully opening from September.
- 3.4.12 The test and trace flowchart developed by the Test and Trace Children's Group to support early years setting in outbreak management, has proved a useful tool for

supporting the Little Owls setting to manage the process when dealing with a positive case (to date there have been 4 positive cases, which were all staff members).

- 3.4.13 It is acknowledged that the current situation relating to Covid-19 is ever changing and as such it has been important to remain flexible in meeting the needs of the service whilst keeping within government guidelines. As the restrictions are being lifted, risk assessments on the remaining sites have been carried out to ensure all protective measures (including adequate staffing) are in place and with a view to re-opening from September onwards.
- 3.4.14 Despite the challenges it has been a useful time for reflection and review and certainly some of the ways in which we have had to adapt our ways of working and communicating through the lockdown period will actually be more efficient moving forwards.

3.5. **Schools**

- 3.5.1 When schools re-opened for certain year groups in June, parents could choose whether they wanted their child to attend. However, when schools re-open to pupils in September, all children and young people have to attend. Under Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act, it is the responsibility of parents/carers to ensure their children attend school regularly. This requirement is now back in force.
- 3.5.2 Over the summer, Headteachers have continued to work hard, following further government guidance, to ensure that schools in Leeds are safe for children and staff.
- 3.5.3 Schools have completed comprehensive risk assessments so that they can re-open safely to all children in September. LCC's Health and Safety team have produced the template for this, which has been made available to all maintained and academy schools. Schools are currently being surveyed to determine the exact date they will have all pupils back in. The survey opened on Monday 24th August.
- 3.5.4 The DfE has launched a campaign to encourage pupils back into school. Materials and resources will be examined and added to by colleagues in Learning where required. Some information and frequently asked questions for parents are also available on the Council website.
- 3.5.5 The Department for Health and Social Care has advised that they will be sending schools and further education settings an initial supply of ten test kits for pupils, teachers and staff during the first week of September. The test are only to be offered to individuals who:
- have developed symptoms while at school or at a further education institution,
 - in the exceptional circumstance that it is believed they may have barriers to accessing a test elsewhere, and that by giving them a test kit directly, it will significantly increase the likelihood of them getting tested,
 - it is believed that if sent home without a kit, would not receive a test at all.
- 3.5.6 Where non-attendance is the result of anxiety about possible infection, Children and Families will work with schools and parents to provide reassurance. Schools would always consider each case in its own context and work to remove any barriers before contacting the Local Authority to request to move down the legal process. The attendance team will support schools where pupils have not returned to school using a restorative approach.

- 3.5.7 With the local transport authority, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA), a countywide consultation with families has been held which raised initial public awareness of the government target to reduce the number of school children on public transport by 50% and to secure views about the likelihood of changing school travel plans. Over 2,200 responses have been received from Leeds residents, which indicated an 8% switch away from public transport. In addition, WYCA have worked closely with public transport operators and have been successful in securing 18 public services being re-designated as dedicated school buses as well as 24 additional dedicated school buses being contracted.
- 3.5.8 Secondary school improvement advisers will contact all heads of LA maintained secondary schools in September to gain an overview of the trends evident in this year's exam results and to discuss the school's recovery curriculum.
- 3.5.9 Primary school advisers will meet at the start of the term with Primary School Learning Alliances to gain an understanding of priorities for curriculum and school development. 'Families of Schools' meetings are also scheduled to take place in the autumn term.
- 3.5.10 Since the previous Scrutiny Board in July, the Local Authority has avoided non-urgent communications with Headteachers so as to enable an appropriate break for school leaders. Director of Children and Families Communication Bulletins to schools resumed in the last week of August.
- 3.5.11 During the summer period, bronze meetings for SILCS, Primary and Secondary schools have not taken place and will resume from September. In addition, Headteacher city-wide 'Zoom' conferences and directorate meetings with education trades unions will also resume from the start of the autumn term.
- 3.5.12 Meetings between the Directorate and the DfE have continued throughout the summer holiday, as has the DCS alert single point of LA contact for schools.
- 3.5.13 Alongside the continuation of home-working arrangements, learning support services will be working directly in schools in September, undertaking assessment and offering their support and advice carried out in line with clear risk assessment advice. To this end, the Educational Psychology team will have planning meetings with all schools in September to reconnect and review the support needed for the most vulnerable learners.
- 3.5.14 The teams are also developing the 'Implementing Wellbeing for Education Return' package of resources from the DfE, so this can be delivered as training into schools and colleges reflecting local needs and resources and embedding within Leeds systems and practice.
- 3.5.15 Throughout the pandemic, the Special Education Needs and Statutory Assessment Process (SENSAP) team have been working from home to continue to deliver the statutory services. This will continue from September, with all work being delivered from home unless there are exceptional circumstances that would require them to visit settings. The team will follow the risk assessment processes in these situations but anticipate that meetings and training will be delivered or be attended virtually. The wider use of Zoom has been extended to the team to support with this.

- 3.5.16 There have been 190 new assessment requests made between 2nd April 2020 and 13th August 2020. The new requests received in this period is less than last year, however still relatively constant. There is likely to be an increase in new requests from the autumn term, which will impact on capacity for SENSAP and the associated Learning Improvement teams who contribute to assessments.
- 3.5.17 Whilst, during the last school term, there were modifications of the duty to deliver the full contents of an Education Health and Care plan, this modification has now been removed. The return to school in September sees the return of the absolute duty on settings to deliver what is in a child and young person's EHC plan. It is the expectation that all children and young people will be back in settings and the team will be vigilant to any issues around this to be able to offer schools and settings advice regarding how to make sure any barriers are removed.
- 3.5.18 The Inclusion Service has remained in contact with the key parent carer groups and the DFE and Yorkshire and Humber region through this time.

3.6. **Shielding**

- 3.6.1 In the initial round of identifying people who are extremely clinically vulnerable, over 1400 children were advised as being required to shield. This meant that children needed to stay at home and were not able to attend school. There was some initial confusion expressed by some parents about why their child had been identified as needing to shield. The advice was that parents should speak to their GP or paediatrician and that it would be a clinical decision whether the child was safe to go to school.
- 3.6.2 The initial guidance to local authorities was that this data should not be shared with any other agency. Children and Families challenged this with a strong feeling that all schools should be informed which students on their roll had been advised to shield. Permission was given and a data sharing agreement created. All schools then received the lists of children who were shielding. This was welcomed by head teachers enabling them to ensure that all children were receiving the right support.
- 3.6.3 The Authority was informed, by a number of headteachers, that a small number of students were attending school who had been advised to shield. The advice given was that parents should speak to the clinician, who would make the decision with the parents about whether it was safe for the student to attend school.
- 3.6.4 Support was offered to all families through the food distribution network and the Early Help hubs, this included food parcels and priority access to delivery services from supermarkets. The council had a range of support on offer to families through the food distribution network, this including the provision of sanitary protection. Schools supported students with opportunities for remote learning for students who were advised to shield.
- 3.6.5 The guidance on shielding changed on 1st August. This information was included in the recent communication to schools on attendance. Shielding advice for all adults and children paused on 1 August, subject to a continued decline in the rates of community transmission of coronavirus (Covid-19). This means that even the small number of pupils who will remain on the shielded patient list can also return to school, as can those who have family members who are shielding, if the parents and the child's clinician agree this is a safe option in consultation with the school.

- 3.6.6 Guidance for children and young people who have been shielding has recently been updated and can be found in Appendix 2.

4. Consultation and engagement

- 4.1. Consultation and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders from across the city has been critical to the success of implementing necessary alterations to working practices, the successful transmission and uptake of rapidly changing guidance and ensuring that Children and Families has been able to continue to deliver high quality services in conjunction with its partners. This engagement has included, but has not been limited to: schools and education settings, children and families, health, Police, trade unions, private, third sector and community groups.

5. Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 5.1 Considerations of equality, diversity, cohesion and integration are implicit to the planning of the Council's response to Covid-19. Children and Families Services continue to ensure the prioritisation of support for vulnerable children and families across the city and in monitoring the rapidly changing landscape for our young people, for example, as schools prepare to welcome them back in September.

6. Climate Emergency

- 6.1 Work continues to promote energy efficiency and eco-awareness with schools, students and with families. There are likely to be environmental impacts associated with the current pandemic that will become clearer over time. Where current changes to working patterns reveal potential for carbon saving efficiencies, this potential will be balanced against the determination to continue to deliver high quality services.

7. Resources, procurement and value for money

- 7.1. Given the significance of the financial implications of coronavirus, arrangements are in place for the Council's Executive Board to receive separate and more detailed reports on this matter. The Council's Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board will also be maintaining oversight of the Council's financial management strategy in accordance with its remit.

8. Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

- 8.1. This report has no specific legal implications.

9. Risk management and Business Continuity

- 9.1. The risks related to coronavirus will continue to be monitored through the Council's existing risk management processes.
- 9.2. Children and Families has business continuity plans across 20 key areas of the directorate and many of these plans informed and supported the critical responses during the initial days of Covid-19.
- 9.3. Under normal circumstances, business continuity plans are reviewed periodically and the pandemic has given the service the opportunity to assess their resilience.

- 9.4. Throughout this report, information has been provided on some of the learning points within Children and Families by way of examples of how the business continuity plans may be adapted for the future.
- 9.5. Business continuity plans will be discussed in more detail and as a focus of the Scrutiny Board in January 2021.

10. Conclusions

- 10.1. This report provides an update on the progress being made across Children and Families in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and specifically for those service areas that fall within the remit of the Children and Families Scrutiny Board.

11. Recommendations

- 11.1. The Scrutiny Board is asked to consider the information regarding the Children and Families Directorate's Covid-19 response and continuity planning presented in this report, and determine whether there are any particular issues or areas it would like to focus on in more detail as part of its work schedule this year.

12. Background documents¹

- 12.1. None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.