

Report of the Director of Children and Families

Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Date: 3rd March 2021

Subject: Recognising the potential long term impacts of Covid-19 on children in Leeds



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

Summary

1. Main issues

- School closures have had the most significant impact on the **education** of children and young people in Leeds. This has been the focus of several recent Scrutiny Boards and the information in this report focuses on several issues identified as long term impacts of Covid-19 including: how to catch up on missed education and how to prepare a quality remote learning offer should similar incidents occur in the future.
- The longer term impact of Covid-19 on the **early years** is as yet unknown, as the duration of the pandemic is not known which will affect how long any sort of recovery will take. The duration of the pandemic could make the difference between this being one significant element in the early life of the current group of under-fives or the defining factor in those children's early lives and possibly beyond.
- Support around the **psychological impacts on children and young people** is one of the key focuses of the work being planned for the coming months. Scrutiny Board has already focused in depth on "The Future in Mind Strategy: Leeds Strategy Refresh" at the November board meeting so the information included in this report is to reference some of the additional work being planned.

- The main concerns from the **Youth Service** in Leeds echo those reported by the National Youth Agency as being: Increased mental health problems, children missing from education and those “at risk at home”. In response to these concerns the service is currently focused on street based youth work and outdoor educational activity days. Moving into the recovery phase the service aims to expand this offer to other groups of vulnerable young people including those;
 - Identified via the street based youth work sessions.
 - Accessing specialist/targeted provision such as LGBT+ youth groups and young carers service.
 - Known to statutory services such as Children’s Social Work Service and Youth Justice Service.
 - Referred from schools, clusters or Early Help Hubs due to identified vulnerabilities or low school attendance
 - That are not in education, training or employment.
- Through **youth voice engagement and consultation**, three key areas have been identified of most importance to children and young people in relation to the long term effects of the pandemic: Exams and Assessment, Remote Learning Offer and Mental Health and Wellbeing. This report provides further details on each of these areas.
- Since the beginning of the pandemic and the closure of schools, there has been a growing conversation on ‘pupil wellbeing’ in Leeds that has led to collaborative work between a number of Children and Families’ Services, including the Health and Wellbeing Service and Educational Psychologists, to develop a dedicated set of **wellbeing surveys**. This report provides more information on the surveys.
- **Long-Covid** has a range of different symptoms which can impact on people weeks or months after being infected by Covid-19. In some cases the initial virus may not have made individuals feel significantly unwell before feeling the effects of Long-Covid. Whilst there is evidence that Long-Covid has affected a small number of children and young people, there is still very little known about this version of the virus. Over the coming months, there is likely to be a greater focus and more work done on this long term variant of the virus.
- **Child poverty** has been discussed at the Scrutiny Board in February 2021 and is also on the forward plan to be discussed later in the year. Therefore, this report does not focus on poverty but it has been included in the list of main issues due to the significant impacts it has on the lives of children and families in Leeds and the potential links between poverty, inequalities and Covid-19.

2. Best Council Plan Implications

- The context of Covid-19 is now incorporated into The Best Council Plan (BCP) which 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.
- With the national roll out of the vaccination programme, attention can now be drawn to the long term impacts of Covid-19 on children and families in Leeds.

- Children and Families Services is under increasing 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 critically extremely vulnerable staff, has the potential to be significant. This is being mitigated through detailed risk assessment of both work settings and individuals, where they fall into the clinically vulnerable or extremely vulnerable categories. Where appropriate, staff are working from home. This, combined with Covid support site visits from the Health and Safety Teams of Leeds City Council and dedicated Covid support from the Occupational Health Team, are further helping to reduce risk. There is increasing pressure being placed on the directorate as the needs of vulnerable children and families across the city rise, as many of the control measures in place revolve around limiting the overall number of contacts staff have whilst at work.

4. Recommendations

- The Scrutiny Board is asked to consider the information in this report and to seek to have a full and informed discussion about the long term impacts of Covid-19 on children and young people in Leeds, supported by local authority officers and other experts including the views of children and young people. The outcomes of the board meeting may offer the opportunity to determine areas of focus for the Board as it enters the new financial year in April 2021.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1. This report provides the Scrutiny Board with inputs from some of the key areas where the pandemic has had the most significant negative impact. In addition, the report invites discussion and seeks input from the Board as to the most appropriate distribution of resources in tackling the long term impacts of Covid-19.

2. Background information

- 2.1. Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns have resulted in a sense of fear and anxiety, which has led to short-term as well as long-term mental health implications for children and young people. The magnitude of the impact on children and young people is yet to be fully understood but will be determined by many vulnerability factors that create existing inequalities such as development age, physical health and pre-existing mental health conditions (their own/parents), living in poverty or in the care system.
- 2.2. The disruption caused by the pandemic and successive lockdowns has impacted on the daily lives of children and young people, resulting in lost routines and reduced social contact. The single biggest change for the majority of children during the pandemic has been not attending school. At a time of heightened anxiety, some of the most vulnerable children in the country were unable to access the things that routinely support their wellbeing. A recent poll conducted for Barnardo's by YouGOV reported a rise in issues related to mental health and wellbeing for at least one in three of the participating 4,000 children and young people. Over two-thirds said that not seeing their friends was one of the hardest things about lockdown. Emerging evidence (Anna Freud National Centre for Children & Families Report - December 2020) indicates that young people with eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have reported a worsening of symptoms. Young people with physical health conditions and disabilities are not affected uniformly, with some experiencing lower levels of mental health difficulties than their peers.
- 2.3. The pandemic has also exacerbated existing inequalities, with those living in the most deprived communities affected the most. Covid-19 has exposed and amplified existing inequalities facing children, meaning those already facing the worst life chances have felt the greatest burden from the virus. Before the crisis, disadvantaged children were 18 months behind their wealthier peers in their learning by the time they finished their GCSEs. The full impact of school closures on children's outcomes is not yet known, but the closures are likely to have worsened the disadvantage gap.
- 2.4. School closures have not only affected children's education, they have also potentially left children more vulnerable. Children and young people with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), experience of the care system or other forms of disadvantage have reported higher than usual levels of anxiety and stress. Even before the crisis struck, there were nearly 2.2 million children in England living in households affected by any of the so-called 'toxic trio' of family issues: domestic abuse, parental drug and/or alcohol dependency, and severe parental mental health issues. This equates to six children in the average classroom growing up with potential risk due to their family circumstances. A Centre for Mental Health report notes a 20% increase in phone calls to Childline during the first four weeks of lockdown.

- 2.5. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, Executive Board and Scrutiny Board have regularly considered the local authority's Covid-19 response.
- 2.6. Scrutiny members have met at Scrutiny Boards and working groups to focus their attention on how the Council and partners are working collaboratively to support all children and their families, especially the most vulnerable, during this unprecedented and challenging period.
- 2.7. As the vaccination programme is rolled out nationally, the Scrutiny Board is now focusing on the longer term impacts of Covid-19. This report offers some expert contributions, including the views of children and young people themselves to enable board members to further offer their input to tackling the longer term impacts of the pandemic.
- 2.8. The response to Covid-19 is fast paced and continually evolving.

3. Main issues

3.1. Inputs have been provided on the following areas for consideration by Scrutiny Board:

- Education
- The Impact on Early Years
- Psychological Impacts on Children and Young People
- Youth Work
- Youth Voice Engagement and Consultation
- Leeds Wellbeing Surveys for Schools
- Long Covid
- Child Poverty

3.2. Education

3.2.1 How children will catch up on lost learning

3.2.1.1. In 2020-21, there were two parts to the government's catch up fund.

3.2.1.2. The first part was £80 for each pupil from Reception to Year 11 inclusive in mainstream school and £240 for pupils in specialist settings. Schools can use their funding in a way that suits their cohort and circumstances so long as it is targeted to specific activities which will help pupils catch up on missed education. A number of schools in Leeds have used this money to buy additional digital devices for pupils.

3.2.1.3. The second part is the National Tutoring Programme which provides additional, targeted support for those children and young people who need the most help. This part has two pillars of support.

3.2.1.4. The first pillar is a system whereby participating schools will be able to access subsidised tutoring from an approved list of tuition partners. The second pillar is where trained graduates will be employed by schools in the most disadvantaged areas as academic mentors to provide intensive catch-up support to pupils, allowing teachers in these schools to focus on their classrooms.

3.2.1.5. The government has also committed to providing money to fund further catch up activities in the next financial year and has appointed Sir Kevan Collins as Recovery Commissioner.

3.2.1.6. The terms of reference for the Recovery Commissioner (RC) role have been published and include:

- The remit covers 2 – 19 year olds
- The RC is advising the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, including information on the nature of the summer programme.

3.2.1.7. The Recovery Commissioner is clear that:

- School closures and lost learning have had differential impact on pupils.
- Recovery needs to be school and community-led. That is, local and not “top down”.
- Recovery will require significant investment by the government.
- Learning is about a broad and rich set of experiences and relationships as well as ‘academic’ content. Specifically, for the cohort of pupils who will leave school/college in summer 2021, there will need to be recovery strategies involving employers, apprenticeships policy etc. The RC is also acutely aware of the potential disincentives for pupils to stay on to study A-level programmes (or equivalent).
- Recovery work is Fair, Focused and Fearless. Fair – by understanding differential impacts and implementing strategies to address that. The ‘learning shock’ has been profound for disadvantaged pupils.
- ADCS urged the importance of a holistic approach to recovery.

3.2.2 **Preparations for delivery of a quality remote learning offer into the future**

3.2.2.1. All schools are legally required to have a remote education offer and details of this should be on their website. Anecdotal evidence suggests that schools in Leeds are now delivering a much better remote education offer than they were during the first lockdown.

3.2.2.2. Remote education is not the same as on-line education. It is a broad term encompassing any learning that happens outside of the classroom, with the teacher not present in the same location as the pupils. It can be delivered in a number of different ways. Working through worksheets, reading practical textbooks and undertaking physical activity are all examples of remote education, as well as the live streaming of lessons or accessing pre-recorded on-line lessons.

3.2.2.3. Whilst it is possible to receive a remote education without a digital device or internet access, it is certainly beneficial to have both.

3.2.2.4. The government has run a number of schemes to supply laptops and internet access to those pupils who do not have them. As of 3rd February 2021, 10,992 devices have been provided to maintained schools in Leeds.

3.2.2.5. A further 8678 devices have been delivered to Multi Academy Trusts in the city although as some of these organisations span more than one authority it is hard to quantify exactly how many have come directly to pupils in Leeds.

3.2.2.6. The allocations are in addition to the devices distributed in summer 2020. That is, the 382 devices to Year 10 disadvantaged and 2181 to children with social workers.

3.2.2.7. Nonetheless, there are still many children in Leeds who do not have regular access to a digital device which is not a mobile phone. The latest data from a survey of schools in Leeds found that 2045 pupils in 80 primary schools do not have a device and 757 do not have access to the internet; Of 16 secondary schools responding to

the survey, 1690 pupils do not have a digital device and 262 have no internet access.

- 3.2.2.8. Local schemes and initiatives are working hard to fill the gap by asking for donations and repurposing old equipment to give to families in need. For example, Digital Access West Yorkshire (DAWY) launched a device donation, recycling and gifting scheme in April 2020. They also have a Go Fund Me page which has raised over £7,500 since mid-January.
- 3.2.2.9. In some cases, Councillors and residents have set up hyper-local schemes to meet the need in specific areas of the city. Some of these schemes are working with or receiving support from DAWY or Tech Angels while others are running independently. Some businesses and communities in Leeds are donating equipment, money or volunteer hours.
- 3.2.2.10. DIS have held preliminary discussions with colleagues about the equipment recycled by the Council and NHS organisations. There are potential risks and cost implications associated with any changes to existing processes governing data security, cyber security and physical disposal of assets. However, there is a desire to do more to help and to offer more visible support to the schemes in Leeds.

3.2.3 **Other factors where children are likely to be impacted the most due to Covid-19**

- 3.2.3.1. One of the main issues currently is the amount of missed learning and that, as a result, children will lack core skills and knowledge. Of particular concern is the progress of young people in Years 10, 11, 12 and 13 who should be taking public exams which will allow them to move to their next destination.
- 3.2.3.2. Research nationally also indicates that children in Year 6 are not at the standard they would usually be in transitioning to secondary school and that younger children are missing key opportunities to develop socially and emotionally.
- 3.2.3.3. It is tempting to think that in order to address this need schools should provide more teaching, longer school days, shorter school holidays and summer school places. This potentially risks increasing the anxiety of young people and putting added pressure on an already exhausted teacher workforce.
- 3.2.3.4. In Leeds, the approach is to consider quality rather than quantity. At secondary level, our training is focusing on supporting teachers to identify specific gaps in learning, to reteach content and to address misconceptions. This will be supported with input from Huntington Research School. The Learning Improvement service will also work with teachers to develop subject expertise and to reshape the curriculum so that there is a focus on the key concepts pupils need to understand in order to progress.
- 3.2.3.5. At primary, there is an unremitting focus on early reading as this is the gateway to the curriculum and further learning in school and beyond. All members of the Learning Improvement Team are receiving training in early reading from an Ofsted HMI, the Library Service is working with Children and Families Directorate to promote the Summer Reading Challenge and there is a planned research project in place with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to address the vocabulary gap at transition from primary to secondary schooling.

- 3.2.3.6. It is anticipated that there may be even more requests for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) as the gap widens in attainment and progress for some learners or Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) issues prevent access to learning.
- 3.2.3.7. It is possible that there will be even greater numbers of requests for support from Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Inclusion services including attendance and pupil tuition. This is likely to see the vulnerable learner's agenda increase significantly.
- 3.2.3.8. Increased levels of need will inevitably result in even greater numbers of requests for therapeutic/counselling services.
- 3.2.3.9. Over the course of the pandemic there has been a significant rise in the number of Electively Home Educated (EHE) children and young people. There are now concerns that some families who have opted for EHE will not return to mainstream schooling. The EHE team continues to implement usual practice and protocols despite this increased volume including safeguarding calls / garden visits to parents, check-ins with social care and review of suitability of education plans as well as annual check-ins focused on year 11 and post-16 pathways.
- 3.2.3.10. Over the course of the pandemic patterns of non-attendance at school may have been established which could lead to a lack of motivation to attend and engage.
- 3.2.3.11. There are concerns that for some young people anxiety and trauma will lead to increased school refusal.
- 3.2.3.12. The current context may lead to greater NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) figures.
- 3.2.3.13. Whilst schools have been in lockdown less requests for support to "Alternative Provision" have been received. This may mean some private/independent providers suffering financially and provisions closing when anticipation is there will be even greater need in the recovery period and beyond.

3.3. **The Impact on Early Years**

- 3.3.1 The longer term impact of Covid-19 on the Early Years is as yet unknown, as we don't know how long the crisis will persist and how long any sort of 'bounce-back' will take.
- 3.3.2 The length of time could make the difference between there being one element in the early life of the current group of under-fives or the defining factor in those children's early lives and possibly beyond.
- 3.3.3 Issues which national groups are focussing on include the impact of social isolation on young children's wellbeing and their learning; the ways in which families and communities are responding to support each other through the crisis; how digital technology can help to mitigate isolation and support children's play and education; the impact of the crisis on pre-existing inequalities; and how to sustain and develop effective early education and wider services to support young children in a post-Covid-19 world.
- 3.3.4 A number of national research projects are underway to assess the impact of the pandemic specifically on the early years' market and workforce. A team from the

universities of Leeds and Bristol have been awarded funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Leeds City Council aims to engage with these and review any findings to identify appropriate actions to support the sector and our children. The key points being considered are:

- Sustainability of childcare provision: some nurseries and childcare providers were under significant pressure before Covid-19, and there are concerns that as many as one in four nurseries may be unable to reopen after the crisis;
- Generating empirical evidence: why are nurseries and other providers closing, what does this mean for the families that use them and how it will affect gender and other social inequalities in households and at work?
- Informal childcare: some 5 million grandparents were estimated to be providing informal childcare support before Covid-19. How will the pandemic affect their ability to continue to do this? What are the implications for working parents?
- Safe environments: what can be done to ensure that childcare environments are safe for workers, children and families? How can childcare staff, children and families who are clinically vulnerable continue to be supported?

3.3.5 A full report on the impact of Covid-19 on the Early Years sector was taken to the Executive Board in February 2021 which outlined that the long term sustainability of the sector is under threat due to the pandemic and inadequate funding and support.

3.4. **Psychological Impacts on Children and Young People**

3.4.1 Support around mental health needs of children and young people is one of the key focuses of the work being planned for the coming months. Scrutiny Board has already focused in depth on “The Future in Mind Strategy: Leeds Strategy Refresh” at the November board meeting so the information included in this report is to reference some of the additional work being undertaken and planned.

3.4.2 Some of the predominant impacts on young people include:

- Young people who have experienced trauma through the pandemic including bereavement, witnessing domestic violence and families who have fallen into poverty.
- Young people who have experienced loneliness and isolation, grief at losing aspects of their childhood such as going to the Prom and other societal rituals.
- Mental health services have experienced increased presentations around eating disorders and self-harm, including later presentations, that is, nationally more presentations of young people needing urgent treatment for eating disorders.
- Some of the psychological impacts for very young children are currently unknown in terms of brain development and socialisation in the context of Covid-19. These children have been social distancing for much or all of their lives and have therefore had limited opportunities to socialise with peers, family members or the wider community.

3.4.3 Universal support for emotional health and wellbeing / SEMH needs:

- Continues to be available to all schools
- Cluster support / Continued Professional Development focusing on specific themes e.g. extended school absenteeism, emotion coaching. (Trauma Informed work with Clinical Commissioning Group will be integrated with this universal and targeted work)
- Critical Incident response on going.

- 3.4.4 It is predicted that there are a number of key groups who might be additionally disadvantaged by the pandemic in terms of their holistic development. Progress made in terms of educational, social, emotional needs could all be impacted. Many of these can be considered as developmental needs. This includes children and young people who already have an identified special educational need or where one is emerging.
- 3.4.5 Examples include:
- Children and young people with neuro-diverse needs. The lockdown has provided some children and young people with a consistent but more limited environment and reduced some of the environmentally mediated factors.
 - Children and young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs who were struggling with systems.
 - Children and young people who are care experienced.
 - Children and young people in alternative provision.
 - These key groups may find it difficult to manage the transition back to school and it may be manifested in a number of ways including impact on relationships, their development, an increase in fixed term exclusions, reduction in attendance, learning outcomes etc.
- 3.4.6 There is the need to consider the transition back to school as a longer process than merely the return to school. Needs should be considered in terms of the pandemic increasing the vulnerability for many children and young people. It is possible that issues may arise later but still be a result of the lockdown and school disruption.
- 3.4.7 Points of transfer will be key. That is, children and young people who have transferred from one school to another, with an identified need. Systemic change reduces protective factors. Attending school is not the protective factor. It is the school system and community that offers the resilience within the relationships, routines, known factors etc.
- 3.4.8 Particular attention will be needed for those children and young people who have moved into the Early Years, Years 6-7, Year 11 - Post 16 and for any children and young people who have been in alternative provision.
- 3.4.9 The Special Educational Needs and Disability and Inclusion Strategy has a significant focus on priorities which respond to the pandemic. This includes early identification of need and building resilience and skills within the workforce.
- 3.4.10 A number of work streams are in progress to respond to the immediate needs but also to look ahead.
- 3.4.11 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) teams support:
- Continued focus on statutory and core work.
 - Ongoing availability for conversations and collaboration on joint problem solving within schools and clusters.
 - SEND services continue to offer support to families and school (via virtual means where possible) e.g. STARS virtual drop-ins for schools and parents, Educational Psychology consultations.
- 3.4.12 Work within settings of recovery planning for specific groups. It is becoming more focused on specific cohorts and the impact of the lockdown in terms of disruption to education.

3.4.13 **Early Help Hubs**

- 3.4.14 The Early Help Hubs are multi-disciplinary teams based across three localities in the city; West, East and South Leeds. The teams consist of early help practitioners, Police and specialist coordinators in substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health.
- 3.4.15 Since the beginning of the pandemic, the mental health coordinators have seen a high rise in anxiety across the board, but for those shielding this has brought added pressures particularly in relation to isolation, the pressures of home schooling and worries about contracting the virus. There has been an increase in young people, parents and carers feeling suicidal and there is often a sense of 'desperation' when contacted by the coordinators. People who have not previously recognised or understood their own mental health have been noted to be seeking support for the first time, with a particular focus on anxiety, depression and trauma as people have little distraction and a great deal of time to think. There are themes around people struggling with sleep, motivation and the lack of structure and routine which often leads to them feeling unmotivated and struggling to stay positive. It is noted that single parents are often struggling with children being at home all of the time.
- 3.4.16 Another common theme of the coordinators work is in digital exclusion and poverty which has been further compounded by the pandemic. Whilst the coordinators roles are often around signposting families to more sustainable services, many are running virtually which is a barrier in itself. For this reason, caseloads of the coordinators are increasing, so as to ensure that they are able to support individuals until the right time, when they can signpost to the right service. Some individuals have lacked confidence in accessing online services, particularly if English is a second language and are awaiting the end of lockdown before they access the appropriate services. This could compound waiting lists and lead to a delay in mental health needs being supported early on. Early Help Hubs are prioritising identification of initiatives which can mitigate the increasing workloads and potential waiting lists.
- 3.4.17 Children being home schooled is an added pressure for many parents who are working with the mental health coordinators. They often 'over worry' about doing a good job, that their children may fall behind or that they will be judged by schools if work is not completed. They have often had doubts about themselves and their own capacity to home school which is even more prevalent when children or parents are shielding or have any additional needs.
- 3.4.18 The coordinators often link in with the substance misuse and domestic violence coordinators in their work and all three areas have increased pressure points currently.
- 3.4.19 A central focus of the Early Help Hubs is also to work to ameliorate the impacts of the work being undertaken on poverty. A further report on child poverty will be presented to Scrutiny Board later in 2021 and the Board also recently focused on child poverty at the meeting in February 2021.
- 3.4.20 In terms of the co-ordinators roles, they are available to families and professionals to provide a responsive service in terms of mental health support. Prior to their roles, families and professionals were limited as to where they could seek this support and advice. The coordinators carry caseloads where appropriate, but with a

view to signposting families as soon as possible. They also provide bespoke training to professionals, often linking in with the other practitioners within the Hubs. They plan to undertake a joint piece of work with the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) in delivering training to a cross section of professionals.

3.4.21 The coordinators are committed to a Think Family Work Family approach and whilst they are commissioned through adult services, ensure that the needs of the children are met by supporting their parents. This work is continually developing but is ensuring that a whole family approach is applied to the families with whom they work.

3.4.22 In addition to the work of the mental health coordinators, the council has recently commissioned Northpoint to offer counselling sessions to parents; this has been achieved through the recent, successful bid through the DfE and has had a positive uptake.

3.5. Youth Work

3.5.1 In April 2020 the National Youth Agency (NYA) published a report “Out of Sight: Vulnerable young people COVID-19 Response” ([Out-of-Sight-COVID-19-report-Web-version.pdf \(nya.org.uk\)](#)) Within the report it detailed how young people’s existing needs increased or were caused by the restrictions placed on them due to Covid-19.

3.5.2 The main concerns identified are;

- Increased mental health problems – calls to help lines significantly increased, with services reporting that mental health of young people has deteriorated due to school closures and not being able to access mental health support.
- Missing from Education – it was estimated that as few as 5% of young people were engaged in school and had limited access to youth work.
- “At risk, at home” – the report suggested that over a million young people were at risk from one or more of the “toxic trio”, addiction, mental health and domestic abuse.

3.5.3 The experience in Leeds mirrored these concerns, with youth workers hearing from young people that social distancing and as a result, their growing sense of isolation, compounded and increased the issues they were facing. Daily report logs from Safer Leeds showed young people starting to tire of the lockdown and becoming more challenging towards the Police. A growing number of young people were observed congregating in open spaces in the city. To respond to this joint working between locality youth services and the Police began; with the purpose of engaging those groups of young people not adhering to national guidance. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic West Yorkshire Police have taken an Engage, Encourage, Enforce approach to address young people’s behaviour with regard to restrictions. By working with detached youth work teams at the engage and encourage stages there has been a reduced need for the Police to take an enforcement approach and fewer young people were issued Covid-19 warnings.

3.5.4 In August 2020 the NYA published a second report “Inside Out – Young people’s health and well-being: a response to Covid-19” ([Inside-Out-NYA-Brook-2020-1.pdf](#)). This paper builds on the insights from the ‘Out of Sight?’ research report and explores the impact of the pandemic on young people’s health and the role of young people’s services in support of vulnerable young people. Key findings outlined in the report include;

- The crisis has compounded inequalities that already existed and has hit vulnerable and marginalised groups the hardest. This includes young people who attend specialist LGBT+ groups, young carers, mental health support, violent crime reduction activity, to name a few.
- The closure of some health services along with youth centres, schools and colleges have left young people reliant on online services for health advice and support. Reduced face-to-face contact among young people and their friends during the pandemic could have damaging long-term consequences in forming new relationships and in making healthy life choices.
- There are concerns for poor diet and low levels of physical activity, as the primary causal factors to excess weight: obesity is also associated with poor psychological and emotional health. This has been exacerbated by the lack of group activity in youth, community and sports activities, and unhealthy diets associated with an increased consumption of takeaways and snacks.
- The impact of Covid-19 on the economy will also affect longer term health. There is extensive research evidence that early unemployment leads to long term poor health outcomes and the relationship with educational levels too. There is a renewed focus on employment and training opportunities for young people leaving school or further and higher education. For long term sustained support of young people's health and wellbeing there is a need for significant investment to recruit, train, upskill and support youth workers to better provide emotional and practical support to young people. Furthermore, there is a predicted surge in youth unemployment as 16-25s are the groups most likely to be furloughed or made redundant due to being in sectors like hospitality and retail.

3.5.5 There are worrying patterns emerging that since the social distancing measures have been introduced the most at risk young people have been suffering with growing mental health issues. Many are struggling to maintain contact with peer support networks that are meaningful to them.

3.5.6 Whilst schools have remained open to vulnerable children and key worker children in Leeds very few of the most at risk young people have been attending for various reasons, including the need to shield or self-isolate. Previously this provided a structure for positive engagement and education for young people. In addition to this youth clubs, leisure centres, shops and fast food outlets have been closed, where they used to meet friends and socialise.

3.5.7 The Youth Service have found alternative ways to engage with young people and bring them together but young people have reported that, although these opportunities are valuable to them, they are not the same as face-to-face contact.

3.5.8 With the Governments 'stay at home' message many of these young people are living in households struggling with domestic violence, drug & alcohol use and serious stress and anxiety. With reduced access to services and fewer people to talk to for support, to their needs could be hidden. The records of partner services, particularly the Police, Children's Social Work Service, Youth Justice and the Anti-Social Behaviour Team that are shared with the service, have shown a significant increase of reported aggressive or violent incidents and family stress since the lockdown.

3.5.9 To respond to these findings, Leeds Youth Service is delivering a number of programmes which aim to address these issues through a range of youth work activities;

- **Street based youth work** – increased presence of youth work teams in the communities of greatest need. The locality youth work teams continue to work closely with the neighbourhood Policing teams to engage with and divert groups of young people away from anti-social behaviour into positive activities. Using health and wellbeing packs as a tool to engage and support young people and their families, the teams have been able to identify young people that are struggling most, signposting and referring them to more specialist health and welfare services when needed. This approach has also enabled the youth workers to identify those young people not participating in education, employment and training and support them, via the Leeds Pathways team, to access an appropriate positive destination.
- **Outdoor Educational Activity days** – The Outdoor Education Centres have not been able to provide school residential or activities and private bookings have stopped. However the centres have been able to provide bespoke 1-2-1 activities for young people in foster care and small group activities for all the Childrens Homes under strict hygiene conditions and ensuring the social distancing rules are fully applied. Opportunities for young people with learning difficulties to access social educational programmes under the Leeds City Council Short Breaks scheme have continued. These opportunities for the most vulnerable children and young people have proved to be vital in reducing the risk of placement and family breakdown at this challenging time. The feedback from young people and staff has been really positive identifying learning new skills, improving confidence and communication and teamwork.

3.5.10 Moving into the recovery phase the service aims to expand this offer to other groups of vulnerable young people including those;

- Identified via the street based youth work sessions.
- Accessing specialist / targeted provision such as LGBT+ youth groups and young carers' service.
- Known to statutory services such as Children's Social Work Service and Youth Justice Service.
- Referred from schools, clusters or Early Help Hubs due to identified vulnerabilities or low school attendance.
- That are not in education, training or employment (NEET).

3.5.11 This provision will combine exciting outdoor education experiences and a connection with nature, with a youth work approach that fosters personal and social development for children and young people. Using face to face engagement / activity that can be delivered whilst adhering to social distancing, there will be a mix of outdoor activities aimed at developing social skills and aspirations, increasing physical activity in order to improve physical and mental health & wellbeing, along with structured issue based workshops dependant on the needs of the group.

3.6. **Youth Voice Engagement and Consultation**

- 3.6.1 Leeds Youth Council “Youth Covid Bronze” group have held monthly meetings since October 2020. The group is attended by staff from School Improvement teams and young people are invited to present their key concerns / discussion points to the monthly Schools Covid Bronze Group for Headteachers.
- 3.6.2 Leeds Youth Voice “Student Support Survey” in June 2020 had 72 responses from young people aged 11-18. The results were shared with the Director of Children and Families, and with secondary school leaders.
- 3.6.3 Children and Families Trust Board (CFTB) “Youth Takeover” in January 2021. Young people attending took part in workshops with CFTB members to share the current challenges and issues they are facing caused by the impact of Covid-19 on their education.
- 3.6.4 A House of Lords Covid Enquiry workshop was held in September 2020. Young people attending worked with staff from the House of Lords to participate in the “Life Beyond Covid” government inquiry.
- 3.6.5 Decision maker Q&A workshops were held between April and August 2020 for young people to meet, ask questions to and share ideas with decision makers. These workshops included a meeting with Hilary Benn MP, a meeting with Cllr Fiona Venner (Executive Member for Children and Families) and two meetings with Sal Tariq (Director of Children and Families).

3.6.6 **The key themes / what young people are telling us**

3.6.6.1. **Exams and Assessment**

- 3.6.6.2. Going back to summer 2020, the issue of exams and assessment has been a huge source of anxiety and uncertainty for young people.
- 3.6.6.3. Students in Leeds are acutely aware of how much *lost learning* took place over the Autumn Term of 2020 due to the high levels of ‘collapsed bubbles’. Some students have reported missing up to a month of on-site learning. They felt they were being placed at a particular disadvantage compared to students in other parts of the country which, at that time, had much lower infection rates. This issue has been compounded further by schools being closed for most students at the start of 2021.
- 3.6.6.4. Students are increasingly concerned about the lack of certainty and clarity over how they will be assessed this academic year. Regardless of how assessment is implemented, students are reporting feeling anxious about how fair the process will be. Students who prefer to sit exams have told us that if grades are awarded by teaching staff they fear they will not do as well. Furthermore, students are worried that any centre-assessed coursework they completed prior to January 2021 may now not count towards their final grades. Finally, students have said that if final grades are based on predicted grades by their teachers this could also be unfair as those predictions are based on student performance during a period of high stress and lost learning from collapsed bubbles / lockdowns.
- 3.6.6.5. Students who missed out on sitting their GCSE exams in Summer 2020 felt that they have missed out on ‘real world’ experience of sitting exams and this may have a negative impact on their ability to perform in A-level exams.

3.6.6.6. Remote Learning Offer

3.6.6.7. Young people have reported that they feel there is a mixed experience in terms of the remote learning provisions for schools and colleges in Leeds. Students have reported being set unrealistic levels of home-learning and homework that does not reflect the difficulties of a home-learning environment without direct support from teaching staff. Some students have spoken very positively about their schools creating “live learning” lessons using Zoom / Google etc., however other students have lamented that this hasn’t been offered by their schools.

3.6.6.8. The issue of motivation has been raised, specifically how difficult it can be to self-motivate whilst remote-learning as often there are too many distractions in a home-learning setting with siblings and parents working from home. Furthermore, students have reported the stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic and its effect on education has further reduced motivation levels. It has been suggested that when using remote-learning, schools should give particular emphasis to ways to ensure students remain motivated and engaged – this may need to be achieved through wider pastoral support.

3.6.6.9. Mental Health and Wellbeing

3.6.6.10. This is the current UK Youth Parliament campaign and an issue that has intersected all engagement work over the past ten months. The pandemic has had a hugely detrimental effect on many of the young people whose voices we hear. Separate to the general levels of anxiety around themselves, family and friends falling ill to Covid-19 there are many negative wellbeing effects relating to education.

3.6.6.11. Young people have reported feeling anxious about high levels of uncertainty around assessment and examinations.

3.6.6.12. Young people have reported feeling a lack of closure on the last academic year – for example not having the chance to say a proper goodbye to school friends and staff before they transitioned to college.

3.6.6.13. Young people have reported their schools could do more to support their mental health and wellbeing, for example; reaching out proactively to students home-learning to “check in”, creating remote social opportunities in addition to the learning offer e.g. Zoom quizzes with Tutor Groups.

3.7. Leeds Wellbeing surveys for schools

3.7.1 Since the beginning of the pandemic and the closure of schools, there has been a growing conversation on ‘pupil wellbeing’ in Leeds that has led to collaborative work between a number of Children and Families’ Services, including the Health and Wellbeing Service and Educational Psychologists, to develop a dedicated set of wellbeing surveys.

3.7.2 The resultant free surveys support and guide schools (and services) to identify where intervention and support is most required to best establish and support pupils’ social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs following their return to school. Survey completion is voluntary and surveys will remain available until July 2021, as they may prove useful for supporting pupils as and when they re-integrate

into school following a prolonged period of absence. The wellbeing surveys comprise questions on pupils’:

- Emotional/mental health
- Physical health
- Experiences during lock down
- Change, loss and bereavement
- Relationships
- Support available to pupils / students

3.7.3 Tailored versions of wellbeing surveys were produced for Early Years / Key Stage 1 (parents / teachers may complete on behalf of children), Primary (Key Stage 2), Secondary, Post 16 and a Parents / Carers survey.

3.7.4 The latter was developed for schools and settings posing questions about family wellbeing during, and after, lockdown with answers providing an insight into how schools / settings might best be able to support pupil wellbeing going forward.

3.7.5 There is an opportunity for the wellbeing surveys to inform what Chris Russell, Acting National Director of Education, Ofsted, has described as *“a good constructive conversation with schools and college leaders and telling the wider world how this generation of young people is getting back to learning.”*

3.7.6 Headline data from the Early Years Survey:

- One in twenty respondents reported it was difficult to access food during lockdown. The main reason given was being short on money (nearly 70%).
- 39% of respondents reported that their child was less physically active during lockdown with 17% reporting that their child was more physically active.
- During lockdown, 35.3% of respondents reported their children were **more worried**, 32.4% reported their children were **more angry** and 35.7% reported their children were **more sad**.
- Where children were worried, upset or anxious:
 - 80.23.% reported it was due to not seeing family members and missing them
 - 83.75% reported it was because of not seeing friends and missing them
 - 68.37% reported it was because of missing school/nurse and their teachers
- 3.07% reported if their child was worried, upset or anxious it was due to a bereavement, 1.32% reported it was due to being ill themselves, and 3.95% reported it was because someone close to them was ill.
- 57.64% felt their child’s behaviour had changed during lockdown, and 48.82% felt their child’s sleep pattern had changed during lockdown.
- 35.8% of respondents felt their school/early years setting supported them very well during lockdown, whilst 10.1% didn’t feel supported at all.

3.7.7 Headline data of Parents and Carers Survey:

- 42.68% of respondents reported that most of the time the family coped really well in lockdown and 48.61% reported that some of the time they coped well and some of the time it was difficult. 7.47% reported that most of the time they struggled in lockdown.
- 34.70% of parents/carers reported they had no concerns about their child returning to school with 5.86% reporting they were extremely concerned.

- 54.32% of parents/carers reported their child had no concerns about returning to school and 3.73% reported their child was extremely concerned.
- Bereavement:
 - 14.06% of parents/carers reported they had experienced a bereavement in their family during lockdown
 - 4.28% of those parents/carers reported it was due to Covid-19
 - 23.15% reported it was not directly due to Covid-19.
- Learning:
 - 21.01% of parents/carers felt extremely concerned about the effect of lockdown on their child's learning, 14.79% had no concerns.
 - 28.77% of parents/carers had no concerns about how they supported their child with their school work during lockdown and 10.18% were extremely concerned.
- Parents/carers were asked how concerned they were about a number of options around children returning to school:
 - The top 3 'extremely concerned' responses:
 - Possibility of your child catching COVID-19 (19.2%)
 - Limited range of creative activities available (10.3%)
 - Support for children's mental health and wellbeing (8.1%)
 - The top 3 'quite concerned' responses:
 - Limited range of creative activities available (21.2%)
 - Possibility of your child catching COVID-19 (18.9%)
 - Support for children's mental health and wellbeing (14.6%)
 - Talking about COVID-19 with their children:
 - 85.94% of parents/carers reported talking to their child about COVID-19
 - 40.92% of parents/carers reported letting their child know that it's okay to be worried about COVID-19
 - 42.75% of parents/carers reported encouraging their child to do practical things in response to COVID-19
 - 3.07% of parents/carers tried to avoid their child seeing or hearing information about COVID-19
 - 1.68% of parents/carers tried to avoid talking to their child about COVID-19

3.7.8 Headline data Pupils Wellbeing Survey includes:

- During lockdown, 25.13 % of pupils reported that their mental health improved, 25.98% reported it got worse, and 48.89% reported no change.
- Caring responsibilities:
 - 9.45% of pupils reported they had to look after someone in their family because they were ill with coronavirus, either some days (6.88%) or most days (2.57%).
 - 28% of pupils reported they had to look after someone in their family because they were too young to look after themselves (i.e. siblings), either some days (15.83%) or most days (12.17%).
- Safeguarding:
 - 64.57% felt school was good at helping them to keep safe during lockdown, 27.57% weren't sure, and 7.86% disagreed.
 - 15.83% of pupils reported they were worried because there was more arguing/conflict at home.

- 8.98% were worried because there was aggression/fighting at home.
- 7.49% were deliberately hurt by someone at home.
- 6.22% had experienced suicidal thoughts.
- 5.42% felt they had lost their 'safe' place away from difficult or dangerous home environments.
- 53.81% had not experienced any of the above.
- School/College:
 - 52.95% felt their school was good at staying in touch with them, 13.7% disagreed.
 - 53.66% reported they felt their school was good at being there if they needed them, 12.5% disagreed.
 - 71.02% felt the school was good at supporting them with their learning, 7.7% disagreed.
- After the previous lockdown, have you been able to get support from school/college to help you with your emotional and mental health if you needed it?
 - 66.38% felt they didn't need any support
 - 13.21% felt they had enough support from school/college
 - 7.04% didn't receive support from their school but got support from somewhere else
 - 6.33% hadn't told anyone in school or college
 - 2.89% didn't get support from school or anywhere else
 - 4.15% needed more support from their school/college

3.8. **Long Covid**

- 3.8.1 Long Covid has a range of different symptoms which can impact on people weeks or months after being infected by Covid-19. In some cases the initial virus may not have made individuals feel significantly unwell before feeling the effects of Long-Covid.
- 3.8.2 The most common issue with Long-Covid is fatigue with additional problems such as breathlessness, a persistent cough, hearing and eyesight problems, headaches and loss of smell and taste.
- 3.8.3 Whilst there is evidence that Long-Covid has affected a small number of children and young people, there is still very little known about this version of the virus.
- 3.8.4 Due to the lower prevalence of Long-Covid and relatively mild sets of symptoms, focus has primarily remained on the initial Covid-19 virus and the subsequent variants seen to date e.g. South African variant, Kent variant.
- 3.8.5 As the pandemic continues into its second year there is likely to be more of a focus on Long-Covid and the impacts on children and young people.

3.9. **Child Poverty**

- 3.9.1 Child poverty has been discussed at the Scrutiny Board in February 2021 and is also on the forward plan to be discussed later in the year. Therefore, this report does not focus specifically on poverty but has been included in the list of main issues due to the significant impacts it has on the lives of children and families in Leeds and the potential links between poverty and Covid-19.

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, youth settings, health, Police, trade unions, academics, 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 city's long term response to Covid-19. Children and Families Services continues to ensure the prioritisation of support for vulnerable children and families across Leeds and in monitoring the rapidly changing landscape for our young people, for example, in supporting schools to provide an equitable remote learning offer when bubbles collapse through local outbreaks of Covid-19.
- 5.2 As attention becomes focused on longer term impacts of Covid-19, the local authority and partners are aware of the potential widening of the gaps in outcomes and opportunities between vulnerable children and their peers. In addition, the number of vulnerable children and families continues to rise due to the significant impact of the pandemic and as a result the local authority is working hard to identify and offer support to those who were not previously in these challenging circumstances.
- 5.3 Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on children and families from BAME backgrounds, due in part to the inequalities which already existed pre-pandemic. The longer term implications are unknown but are predicted to be significant and as such the planning and implementation of support and resources by the local authority and partners will need to take these disproportionate impacts into account.

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 pandemic that will become clearer over time. As the pandemic enters its second year it is important to focus on the longer term impacts of Covid-19 on the climate emergency. Where current changes how work is undertaken, how schooling is delivered and where support is offered to children and families, there are potential opportunities for carbon saving efficiencies. This potential is being 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 Covid-19, 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 maintains oversight of the 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

- 9.1 The risks related to Covid-19 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 inform the critical responses to 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.

10 Conclusions

- 10.1 This report provides an opportunity for Scrutiny Board to investigate some of the main areas of concern with regards to the long term impacts on Covid-19 on children and young people in Leeds.

11 Recommendations

- 11.1 The Scrutiny Board is asked to consider the information in this report and to seek to have a full and informed discussion about the long term impacts of Covid-19 on children and young people in Leeds, supported by local authority officers and other experts including the views of children and young people. The outcomes of the board meeting may offer the opportunity to determine areas of focus for the Board as it enters the new financial year in April 2021.

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.