

Circulation	Cllr Rachel Powell, Portfolio Member for Young People & Culture Ali Bulman, Corporate Director of Social Services
From	Jan Coles Head of Children's Services
Title	Children's Services and COVID-19
Purpose	Update from Children's Services during COVID-19 pandemic
Status	Information
Date	30 th April 2020

1. Workforce

Children's Services Workforce absences due to COVID-19 have reduced.

As at 30th April:

- 22 staff throughout the whole of the service were self-isolating due to being in a shielding or vulnerable group but are working from home undertaking partial duties. Of these 22 members of staff, 11 are in business critical teams and are therefore unable to undertake face to face work including statutory visits.
- 1 member of staff was off work due to COVID-19 and not able or not well enough to undertake their role from home.

The testing process has had a positive impact on COVID-19 related staff absences in Children's Services. When staff have had mild symptoms but feel well or have had to self isolate due to a family member having symptoms the testing service has meant that they are able to go back to work much sooner if they confirmed negative for COVID-19.

Despite the very challenging and unique situation we are in due to COVID-19, we are extremely pleased to report that we have been able to recruit 3 permanent qualified social workers into our frontline teams. Once safer recruitment checks are undertaken start dates will be agreed. We continue to strive to reduce our reliance on agency workers and stabilise our workforce further through the appointment of permanent staff.

2. Early Help, Front Door, Assessment and EDT

The Front Door Service have seen an increase in the number of contacts and referrals being made in the last 2 weeks following an initial concerning quieter period when the schools closed. The Front Door service report that they are continuing to get progressively busier with an increase in Police and anonymous referrals. The Service

needed. The property is also in our own County so families are being kept near or in their community and not being moved out of county or out of Wales. This project was set up in response to COVID-19 however since our first parent and baby have moved in we can already see the many benefits and we will be monitoring and evaluating the project closely as we believe it will positively shape the future way that we place and support parents and new born babies in Powys.

Children's Services Family Time Service had to cease many of our face to face contacts due to the risks to our Children, Foster Carers and Staff because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Family Time team have been very creative and out into place ways that children can still have contact with their families using teams and skype call. There have been issues raised about this in Court and with CAFCASS and requests have been made that we should be offering contact in the usual way. We understand and always promote the importance of Children having contact with their Families, however we risk assess every situation and all individual face to face contact and at this time Family Time contacts are not possible to undertake safely.

Work is continuing identifying and supporting our high priority children and families. We are working closely with our colleagues in Education to increase participation in the Hubs and Social Workers are encouraging and supporting families for their children to attend. We are concerned that attendance of our priority children is very low and feedback from families is that they are fearful of sending their children due to COVID-19. We continue to work with families to address barriers to attendance at the hubs and have committed to paying for meals at the hub for all children that have an allocated social worker and/or care and support plan who are not entitled to Free School Meals.

The Care and Support are constantly reviewing each individual Child's situation and our staff are providing support and intervention work to keep them safe and to prevent situations escalating at this very difficult time for Families. Our teams continue their work with Children to achieve their goals and home visits are taking place on an increased basis.

3 Corporate Parenting

The Through Care Teams and Fostering teams continue to be fully operational.

Placement stability continues to be a priority for the service especially during this difficult time of uncertainty for all Children and Young People. As part of our COVID-19 business continuity planning Children's Services were able to temporarily secure a house within the County that could be used as an emergency placement for Children and Young People. Our Children's Commissioning Service worked tirelessly and in a very short period of time ensured the house was ready and on standby if required. This is an example of another innovative project that Children's Services have set up due to COVID-19 and is providing placements within our community. The house is