

# Scrutiny report



14 07 2020

## Children's Services– Covid-19

Name of Scrutiny Committee                      **Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee**

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Exempt / confidential / not for publication	<b>No</b>
Council Plan reference	
Wards affected	<b>All wards</b>

### Executive summary

This report outlines the response from Milton Keynes Council to the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic in relation to the delivery of Children's Services.

The Covid 19 pandemic has seen a major impact on children, families, and schools. Milton Keynes Council (MKC) has been at the forefront of the response to the pandemic working closely with partners to advise, inform, provide additional resources and support through its range of services over this time. This report provides an overview of the activity, work undertaken and updates on the current challenges.

In summary the service has shown a high level of resilience across both its staffing levels and level of performance. There were challenges early in the pandemic in interpreting government guidelines and, at times, competing advice received from the Department of Health and the

Department for Education. It was therefore essential for Children's Services to maintain good levels of communication throughout with our schools, partners and staff. This has continued through weekly communications to schools, regular virtual meetings and ensuring that although many buildings were not able to remain open, services were still able to be delivered where necessary.

Some of the biggest challenges faced by Children's Services has been how we have enabled our most high-risk children and young people to stay safe during this lockdown period and retain 'Good' safeguarding practice throughout. We were particularly mindful of our most vulnerable children with complex needs and disabilities, but the partnership across Milton Keynes has worked well together to ensure the balance of risk to children, families and staff has been proportionately considered. A further challenge has been supporting our high-risk taking adolescents who struggled with social distancing, alongside brokering contact with parents whose children are in our care. This was at times particularly distressing for some of our children with disabilities who couldn't understand the revised arrangements, but the involved professionals, foster carers and our Children's Homes have adapted well in reassuring, supporting and helping meet children's needs.

This is a composite report drawn together from some of the main Service areas within Children's Services for Scrutiny to consider as to the response and contribution in considering next steps.

### **What are we asking the Scrutiny Committee?**

1. To review the response of Children's Services during Covid 19
2. To consider the impact of Covid 19 on children and families in MK
3. To consider and contribute to the performance of the service and next steps.

### **Introduction**

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), we have had to change our way of working. Everyone involved in promoting the welfare, protection and care of children is working extremely hard in the face of unprecedented challenges to support the most vulnerable during this period. It is a time of severe pressure across society, which we know will present heightened levels of risk for some children. It is, therefore, especially important that these children continue to receive the services and support they need, although the way in which this is delivered has changed and adapted to reflect the current circumstances.

### **Children and Families Social Care**

In working with our most vulnerable families, frequently Social Workers are able to know their children and families best, and, in line with normal practice, they can make child-centred, risk-based judgements about where to focus their efforts. However, coronavirus (COVID-19) has brought additional risk and complexity to social work practice and has necessitated some different ways of working.

This initially gave significant challenges as we were unable to fulfil the expectations usually in place for statutory social work visiting. However, with amendments made and legislation revised this allowed more discretion with a disapplication to some existing expectations of child protection practice. This enabled Managers and social workers to make judgements about visiting which prioritises children's welfare as paramount, within the statutory framework, balancing risks to children, risks to families and risks to the workforce and community.

Our approach to this included:

- All children open to Children's Social Care (CSC) and Children and Family Practice (CFP) needs being 'Rag Rated' according to need and risk. Social Workers and managers review weekly and update the Rag rating. Where children are Rag rated Red, we are undertaking visits with Covid-19 precautions in place. Young people rated Amber or Green are contacted virtually. We have increased the frequency of virtual visiting in line with our risk assessments of the child. Virtual visits are recorded on the child's electronic file, as per national guidance and this is under continuous review.
- Our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) operated as normal during this period, with high number of Assessments still needing to be conducted face-to-face.
- All meetings (Child Protection Conferences, Family Support Meetings, Strategy Meetings, Child Care Review Meetings, Professional Meetings) took place virtually, except in extreme circumstances.
- To ensure that case management and recording remained in line with national and regional practice we have been liaising with the South East Quality Assurance group as well as regional and national Principal Social Worker forums which are attended by Ofsted and the DFE. We also provided updates to the Cabinet Member and the Independent Safeguarding Advisor for MKTogether.
- We continue to risk assess our children in care where there is a need or request to change placement. In emergency situations, we have continued to move children where placements have broken down and, where possible, have completed direct visits to settle the child.
- In relation to the education attendance, we are ensuring as many vulnerable and looked-after children as possible attend school, regardless of the year groups. We are working with foster carers, social workers and the Virtual Head Teacher on an individual basis using our vulnerable education checklist to establish their situation.
- We have issued 12 sets of legal proceedings over this period, one more than this time last year and have been able to be involved in virtual court hearings through agreed arrangements with the Judiciary.
- Legal panels have continued to be held virtually. Since January 2020, 19 Public Law Outline proceedings have been issued and 4 (21%) have escalated into court.
- Fostering statutory checks have been suspended according to need or undertaken virtually with annual unannounced home visits being undertaken virtually. Home Safety checks continue to take place but are completed by video call. The service will follow up directly after lock-down.
- We have varied the terms of approval of our foster carers due to reduced capacity caused by COVID but new measures allow us to do this for up to 24 weeks. However, we are still following our existing process of all variations/exemptions to be agreed by Head

of Service and the Agency Decision Maker as soon as possible after the arrangements have been made.

- Following national amendments, we reduced Adoption Panel Quoracy for a temporary period, this continues and will be reviewed and likely to return to full quoracy now the virtual panel process is developed. This also allowed timely implementation of virtual Adoption Panels to ensure business continuity.
- CSC have continued to recruit social workers during this period and have appointed 5 new workers into MASH, 3 into Family Support, 1 into Fostering and 2 into the Corporate Parenting Team.
- CSC also obtained a grant of 23K from the Getaway Foundation to provide essential items to families who were under stress at this time.

How did clients respond over this period?

- Many of our Children in Care and Care Leavers have welcomed the electronic and virtual approach undertaken during this time. Some children and young people have been far more communicative as a result of this change.
- Week beginning 1<sup>st</sup> June saw an increase in numbers of Looked After Children attending school and we have continued to see increases higher than the national average attendance.
- Families were very grateful for our support in securing grants to provide funding for those in need. We secured high number of grants which provided funding to pay electricity bills to providing electronic tablets, outdoor games and garden play equipment.
- Direct observations of practice for audit purposes were positive with the families engaging well with the online visiting protocols. Children also engaged well with the calls, taking the phone away from parents to talk to audit workers when appropriate.
- Some families used the Covid-19 premise to avoid seeing their social worker. We established a 'Hard to Engage' policy to address these issues.
- Mental Health issues were seen to increase during this time with parents requiring additional time and support in managing the challenges they were experiencing.

Some of the challenges faced by the service have now lessened but in the early stages there were some particular difficulties:

- In the early days of lockdown, the lack of availability of PPE and lack of clear guidance on use did offer concern but through working with Health and Adult Services colleagues this was able to be resolved.
- IT was an early challenge in respect of the right equipment for working at home for both our staff and our school children. It gave early additional pressure on the system, but this has also now become much improved.
- Absence of clarity from DFE initially regarding recording statutory visits and concern that we were unable to comply to legal expectations.
- Adolescents not abiding by lock down, which resulted in increased placement breakdowns, young people placing themselves at risk, and of those, three young people were placed in Secure Provision to safeguard their welfare.

- Five Initial Child Protection Case Conferences (ICPC) were cancelled at the beginning of lockdown due to issues of quoracy as several of our partner agencies were not confident that they would be able to attend conferences. At that point Independent Chairs had also not gained confidence in using the technology to chair meetings remotely and concerns were expressed about how families would access meetings effectively and how reports and information would be shared with families. At times families/extended family had said that they had Covid-19 symptoms, and this meant that they would not be available for the conference. These ICPC's have been subsequently gone ahead where necessary.
- Difficulties were seen with undertaking medicals of Foster Carers and DBS for non-household members as pressures on partner agencies continued, therefore we needed to consider greater use of internal risk assessments to mitigate this risk
- A high proportion of our Foster Carers were in the vulnerability category, either due to age or health conditions for Covid-19. This meant that placements were hard to obtain for complex teenagers and mother and baby placements and in these circumstances higher cost arrangements, outside of MK needed to be brokered.

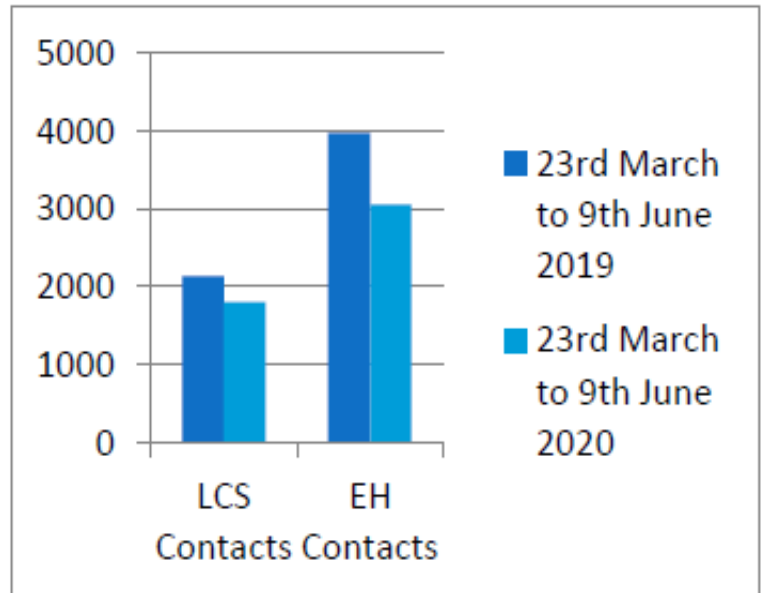
These challenges evidently had impact on how we deployed our staff over this period:

- During the Easter weekend, Family Support Workers made over 40 video/telephone calls to families as part of our weekend support for Children's Social Care. The Emergency Social Work Team (ESWT) received over 103 calls from parents, placements and Police.
- Referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) remained steady throughout March, saw a reduction during Easter in line with half-term, but have started to increase subsequently in line with national reports.
- In the three weeks prior to lockdown, the hub received on average 543 calls, and saw a 259 reduction in volumes in the succeeding weeks. We started to see an increase in calls as the schools returned after half term.
- The average timescale for completing Children and Families Assessments in May was 21.8 days, January had been 33.2 and February 31.5. The statutory timescale is 45 days.
- The number of Child Protection strategy meetings and discussions dropped in April to 97 but in May was 131, similar to the numbers in February and March prior to lockdown.
- The number of families transferring to the Family Support Teams dropped in May to 34, however, the preceding months were consistent. January 55, February 54, March 40, April 45.
- Court Cases proceeded as timetabled but there was some delay in some hearings. Initially there was a throughflow challenge for us as Adoption Hearings were not being prioritised and therefore it was difficult for us to move children onto their permanent homes.
- There has been no change in our safeguarding approach; issuing legal proceedings at the same level as last year and numbers on child protection plans have been largely maintained.
- 35 applications were completed for 13 adolescents to our Emergency Looked After Children Panel but none of these young people were accommodated and other arrangements were able to be put in place.

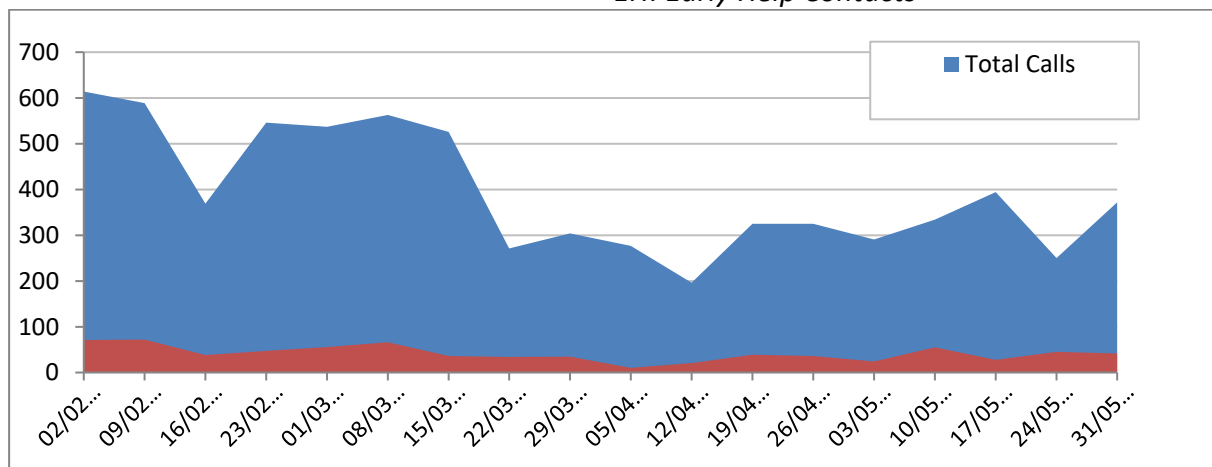
- Over this period, it has been positive to read of the five compliments in respect of the work carried out by MK social workers from the Judges sitting in the Milton Keynes County Court.

### Contacts into the service

Contacts have considerably reduced over this period; almost 20% less. This is an inevitable consequence of the schools being closed to many children and a reduction in referrals from families and other agencies. Contacts are increasing now that restrictions are being lifted. Whilst the number of contacts were reduced, staff in the MASH have utilised this time to catch up with previous assessments. MASH have also used the opportunity to update some of our leaflets, the levels of need document and other key documents.

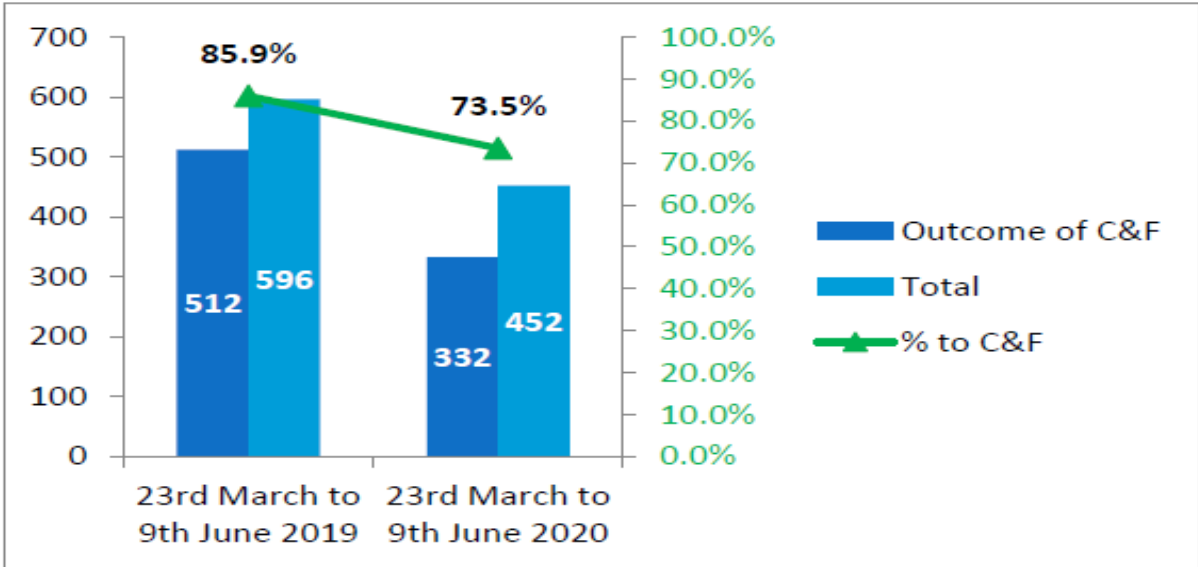


LCS: Contacts that meet Social Care threshold  
EH: Early Help Contacts



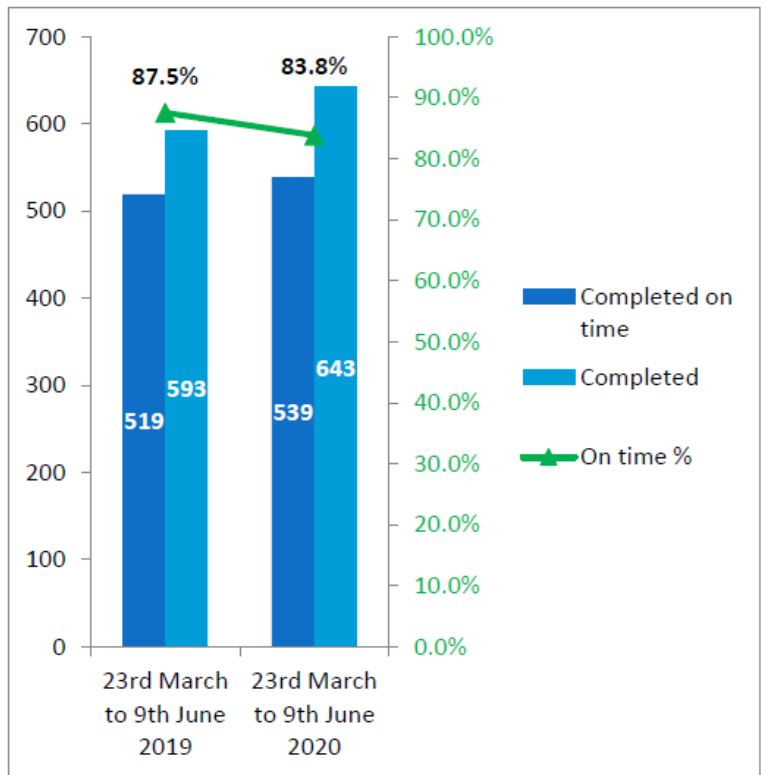
### Multi-agency Safeguarding hub (MASH) referral to assessment

The conversion rate from referral to assessments have also declined (although is higher than the national average). The trend has shown a reduction in conversions from 89% April to October 2019 to 70% since November. Therefore, the conversion rate during Covid-19 is above average.



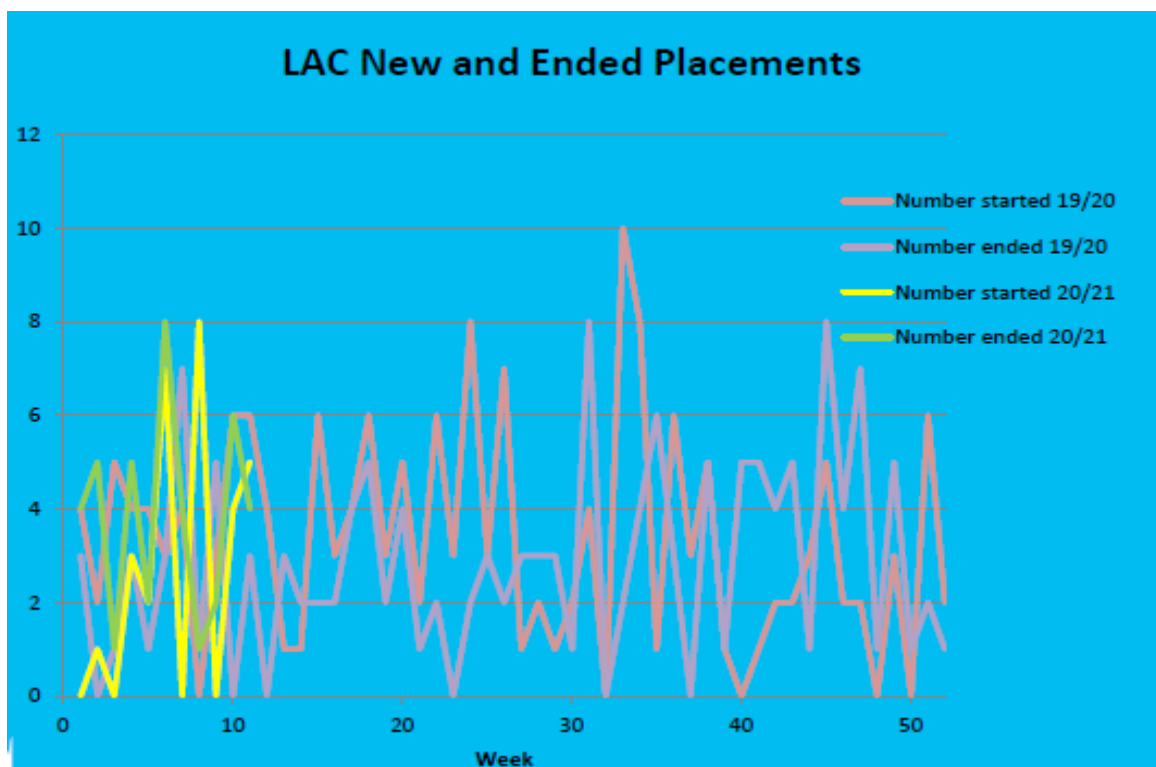
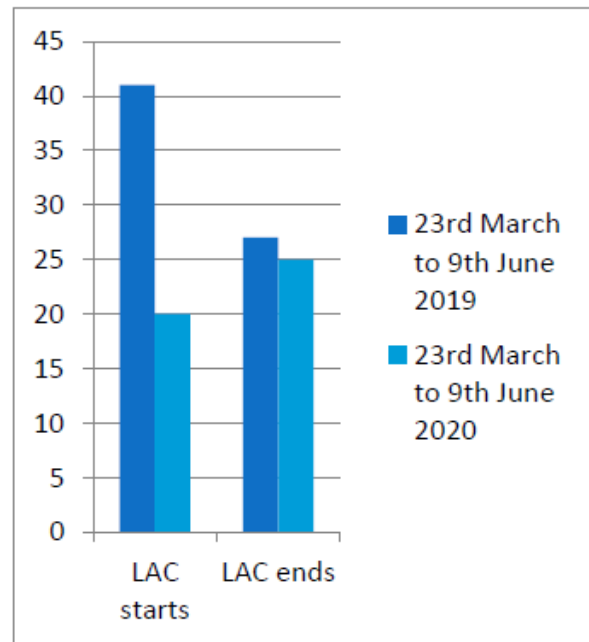
**Children’s Social Care assessments**

Assessments completed have remained level, however, other teams in Children’s Social Care have utilised this period to complete new assessments on open children. The MASH average completion rate for assessments is 21.3 days in this period. Prior to Covid-19, the lead-time was in excess of 30 days. However, these numbers of assessments are for the whole of Children’s Social Care.



## Looked After Children (LAC)

Overall, LAC as at 9 June is more or less the same, however there were far less children entering care than this time last year. Of the 35 Emergency LAC panel applications, accommodation was agreed for one child. There were 5 more LAC applications compared with the same period last year.



## Fostering Service

From the end March 20, the Fostering team are supervising 95 mainstream Foster Carers, 7 Supported Lodgings carers and 44 Kinship Carers. The Fostering Service looks after a total of 194 children as of March 2020 which equates to 68% of our children placed within our in-house fostering service. Our carers have reduced in number since last year as some have taken retirement and, more positively, some have taken SGO and pursued adoption.



It has however been raised as a national concern as to the number of available foster carers and placements and the reflection of the age profile of many carers. Although our foster carers in MK showed great resilience and flexibility, recruitment will continue to be a priority for us to ensure we are able to meet the accommodation needs of our LAC and realise our ambition for them to be cared for within MK when it is safe for them to be so.

### **What has gone well?**

New support groups are now embedded in the service with virtual guest speakers as well as workshops to support those carers completing their Practice portfolio. In addition, the long standing CAMHS support group has been re-formatted so as many carers as possible can make use of this. The group is run by a Senior Child Psychotherapist on behalf of CAMHS and provides 6 group work sessions over 6 months. Foster Carers can also access clinical supervision on a one to one basis with an Attachment Expert who is also just beginning to offer evening workshops.

### **Adoption**

Our Adoption Service has had a successful first year as a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) with Central Bedfordshire. We have seen an increase in Adoptions and more timely adoptions being able to be secured. It has however been a challenging period in being able to broker contact for children and their birth families and progressing some cases through the courts to secure permanent arrangements.

### **What's gone well?**

- A Youth Group was created for 'Adoptee Voice' with plans to develop this into a Youth Panel – the group have made videos of their experiences.
- Stable and consistent staffing. We expect to be fully staffed from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020
- The Service adapted well and promptly to impact of Covid-19 with positive comments received from our Adopters.
- Virtual working practices have progressed in offering information sessions and progressing for adopter preparation training
- Working with other RAA Leaders to share learning, resources, develop practice and influence regulatory changes
- Recruitment continued and children were matched with new adopters and transitioned where appropriate during Covid-19
- Adoption Panel made successful recruitment to Central List to ensure consistent and well-informed decision making
- Performance was maintained across all adoption indicators throughout the period and the service continued to embed new practice arrangements and ensure alignment of Policies and Procedures

Throughout the period of the lockdown we have also been involved in regional and National discussions at the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board. This continues to be a demanding area of activity and the level of assessments needing to be undertaken by practitioners, particularly in the area of Family and Friends' arrangements which has significantly increased over the last two years.

## **Quality Assurance (QA) activity March 2020 – 10 June 2020**

We have been able to increase our Audit activity over the time when referrals into the service had lessened to ensure that case management and recording are in line with national and regional practice. We have been liaising with the South East QA group as well as regional and national Principal Social Worker (PSW) forums.

### **Audits in this period have included:**

- 112 chronology audits
- Team manager audits of all cases held in their teams
- 31 Desk top audits of practice quality
- Thematic audit of the Children and Family Practices service
- 13 virtual direct observations of practice
- Assessment quality audit (sample of 43 assessments)
- Audit of child protection investigations that convert to a Child Protection Conference
- Supervision audit – targeted audit to look at the quality of supervision recording across the service (7 of a planned 31 completed)
- 12 newly qualified social worker (ASYE) external audits of practice portfolios– all graded excellent or good.

### **Findings from audit**

- Compliance in this period has been high
- Chronology audit identified good understanding of child's history but some improvements to be made around what should be within a child's chronology
- Assessments remain of varying quality, but risk to the child is always clear and the safety planning element makes the risk management clear
- Assessments for LAC were noticeably less robust than in other areas of the service, whereas MASH assessments continued to be of a good standard
- Pathway plans and allocation of 16+ Personal Advisors is not consistently happening at 15.5 years therefore more preparation planning is needed and a review to the transfer policy to ensure that this is happening consistently across all teams
- Desk top audits highlight the writing of danger statements as an area to target in training
- Direct observations of practice were positive with the families engaging well with the online visiting protocols. Children also engaged well with the calls to workers.

### **What adjustments have been made due to Covid:19**

Due to Covid:19 the advice from the DfE has been that statutory visiting can be replaced with virtual visits where risk assessments reflect this is safe. To ensure workers are supported in their understanding of a virtual visits and that these remain high quality, the workforce has been issued with the PSW network virtual visiting guidance.

The main deficit in quality assurance in this period has been the need to cancel direct observations of practice due to the decrease in face to face visits and increase in risk to families of having an additional worker attend the visit. For those less experienced social workers (NQSWS and students) we have adapted to support them through virtual observations of their practice to ensure their support is ongoing.

Moving into June 2020 there are five planned observations of virtual CP conferences and Child Care reviews. There is also a request for managers to highlight social workers where they would be willing to support an observation of a virtual home visit.

Additional risk assessment has taken place for each child/young person. This considers the multi-agency response to Covid for the child/young person and identifies the level of risk they are facing because of the pandemic.

The CSC Quality Assurance plan for the year details a quarterly multi-agency audit, however due to Covid:19, some MK Together boards were cancelled therefore the Assurance Board has not been able to meet to progress this. The board is due to return on 29<sup>th</sup> June where a multi-agency audit will be identified and timetabled.

### **Strengthening Families**

Our response to the Troubled Families programme was reviewed during this time and Milton Keynes has been ranked top in a regional league table for its programme. Government figures released this month show that Milton Keynes Council ranks first out of 17 local authorities for its work in this area.

MK's 'Strengthening Families' programme is led by our Children and Family Practice teams in partnership with education, health and police colleagues. It is a co-ordinated approach to helping families in trouble through early intervention work. This may include financial support for essential supplies or help with getting children back into school or their parents into work. A large part of the programme involves preventative work to identify young people facing challenges.

In the past 5 years, the programme has helped 1,600 families in Milton Keynes. These are families with dependent children or expectant parents. Each family will have been facing issues linked to health or antisocial behaviour and even crime in some cases.

Additional government funding is provided for each family that shows sustained improvement across set criteria such as school attendance or continuous employment.

This enables more funding to be channelled back into the programme to identify and support more families.

The latest phase of the Government's 'Troubled Families' programme was launched in 2015. £920 million was allocated to help an additional 400,000 families. Following a Government announcement in January 2020, the second phase is now running to March 2021 but we are continuing to review the service as to how its effectiveness can be maintained going forward.

## **Youth:MK**

Over this period, we have been unable to maintain several of the face to face youth groups and sessions facilitated by our Youth Workers. A significant amount of work has continued however and allowed us to review going forward the key focus for the service. On reviewing the whole service delivery and recognising the impact this time has had on our young people we are currently in consultation on the service and realigning our focus ensure our priorities are:

1. NEET – Not in Employment, Education or Training
2. Young people at risk of Exploitation – including those at risk of crime or gang related activity
3. Participation and Engagement – highlighting the important of young people’s re-engagement in services, socialisation, and positive activities

### **Some of the work the service has undertaken during this period includes:**

- Youth groups – maintaining contact via WhatsApp and phone calls. Workers delivering safe group video calls for peer interaction, essential baby basics deliveries to Teen Parents group. Virtual Groups have included Aspects (Autism), Girls Group, Juniors and Young Parents.
- Participation – work continuing through conference calls and small group WhatsApp video calls, with a virtual residential completed.
- Career Sparks/NEET – supporting young people remotely by phone and via WhatsApp, creating an additional webpage with interactive and informative resources.
- Maintaining contact with partners to deliver the programme to identified young people who are at increased risk of NEET due to lockdown. Ensuring paperwork continues to be compliant and targeting support to NEET Looked After Children and YOT remotely. Social media surveys being prepared to gain feedback from young people to help shape delivery going forward.
- Missing interviews, with young people being contacted within 72hrs of their return, remains high at 95%. In the month of May there were 134 episodes with 62 young people reported missing, 13 of these were from other local authorities and 16 went missing for the first time.

Some of our concerns evidenced some young people reluctant to engage and as accessing less support over this time and some young people did not have the right technology to join in group discussions. This offered concern as to the potential for increase in NEET due to COVID 19 particularly with Year 11 and 12, combined with reduction in provision particularly with apprenticeships and traineeships and other EET opportunities.

## **Children and Family Centres**

Although our Children Centre buildings remain closed to general use, we have continued to use the buildings to support colleagues, e.g. Health Visitors using the centre at weekend to undertake infants injections, and a range of support has been able to be delivered by Children Centre staff.

This has included:

- Rowans Family Centre is at the heart of Food Bank Xtra and running both the main call centre and collection centre.
- Family Centres and most Children’s Centres have midwives on site to see women most in need and SEND colleagues have used the centres for individual children.
- Centres are running many virtual sessions including, cookery, baby massage, story time, messy play and parenting and volunteer classes.
- National mental health campaigns amongst others are promoted.
- Facebook hits are averaging 20,000 a week!

## Libraries

Milton Keynes Library services have remained open for business throughout the COVID-19 pandemic through a digital online presence including:

	April 2019	April 2020
e-audiobooks	798	1400
e-magazines	1026	2723
e-books	439	1534
e-newspapers	4051	8590

- In addition, there are 7/8 social media posts daily with varying content including sourcing / sharing home resources, support for the COVID-19 situation and promoting our extended digital resources.
- Weekly online story times are promoted via social media and platformed on YouTube. From 15 April – 19 June they had 1087 views.
- 300+ new members have joined MK Libraries since the lockdown.
- Home deliveries for vulnerable and house bound customers continue from each library and have increased – for example, there are 21 customers served out of Central Library, up from 14.

In the *“UK Government’s COVID-19 Recovery Strategy”*, it states that restrictions to public library buildings can be eased from the 4 July 2020, depending on the rate of COVID-19 infection, but a review of the service is taking place to consider the best use of the skills of our Library staff and how we ensure that safety to staff and the public is well considered.

There may be an expectation that Milton Keynes Council will follow the national body’s toolkit which has now been produced, but a plan to consider all the options available and carry out a Rapid Service Review listening to the views of our communities, is a priority for us as we would like to consider how Library services may be able to best contribute over the Summer to support some of our most vulnerable communities.

## **Community Learning (CLMK)**

We do want to ensure that Milton Keynes Council's Adult and Community Service (CLMK) maintains its 'Good' grade at its next Ofsted inspection under the new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) but this pandemic has greatly affected our ability to run classes in Adult Education in the way we would have previously.

We were expecting our Ofsted inspection in May/June 2020. The annual Self-Assessment Report (SAR) has been completed and CLMK's management has graded the service as Good. This has been moderated by local peers (Buckinghamshire CC, Central Beds, Hertfordshire CC and Luton) who support the grade and staff have completed Ofsted's own training on the EIF.

In discussions with a lead FE and Skills HMI they believe that the governance structure we have in place, if working effectively, would meet Ofsted's requirements so we consider we have positioned the service well to respond to any inspection. On 12 February the DfE published the Qualification Achievement Rates – for MK these have increased successively over the last few years.

- 2015/16 – 81.6%
- 2016/17 – 86.9%
- 2017/18 – 87.6%
- 2018/19 – 89.2%

These results provide the first impressions when Ofsted prepare for the inspection and will note that achievement rates have increased by 8% since we were last inspected. Going forward, however, we recognise that there is a significant challenge for the service it is only able to deliver courses virtually, which is likely to impact take-up and income.

## **Youth Offending Team (YOT)**

The YOT has continued to undertake its work during this time in a similar way to our Social Care approach. Over this period, we have:

- Sustained contact with higher-risk young people has been provided by both face to face and use of technology (determined on a case by case basis).
- All arrangements include back up plans for those young people/families who are self-isolating such as viewing at the home via windows etc. to ensure they are at home and using technology wherever available /appropriate.
- Youth Offender Panels were being completed virtually wherever possible and as we begin to emerge from the lockdown, we are now considering how we can begin to adopt a new social distancing approach to running panels.
- Appropriate Adult (attendance at the police station) services have been provided throughout
- Courts were managing the breach of high-risk cases at nominated courts across the country. Early on there were some conflicting guidance notes coming out of courts in relation to what courts were running virtually however the YOT was able to react quickly and ensured that all young people were supported at court. Courts are now beginning

to resume, including MK Youth Court, in a very carefully managed and socially distanced way.

### **Education, schools and settings**

We have continued to have very close communication with schools, education settings and their leadership throughout this period. School Improvement Partners have been in regular contact with Headteachers in maintained and academy schools, providing advice, guidance and support. They have continued to deliver training via Webinars and have continued via emails, calls and online meetings to deliver their workstream with schools. Leadership and Governance has continued to clerk governing body meetings and support governors with advice, guidance and support; training has also continued to be delivered via Webinars.

Headteacher and Senior Leader recruitment has continued, and recruitment for three posts have taken place using video conferencing and IT tools. The Virtual School has carefully monitored all the children and young people in their care and have ensured resources have been made available and when possible and appropriate these vulnerable young people have attended school. Our EMA network has provided BAME resources and supports across the education sector.

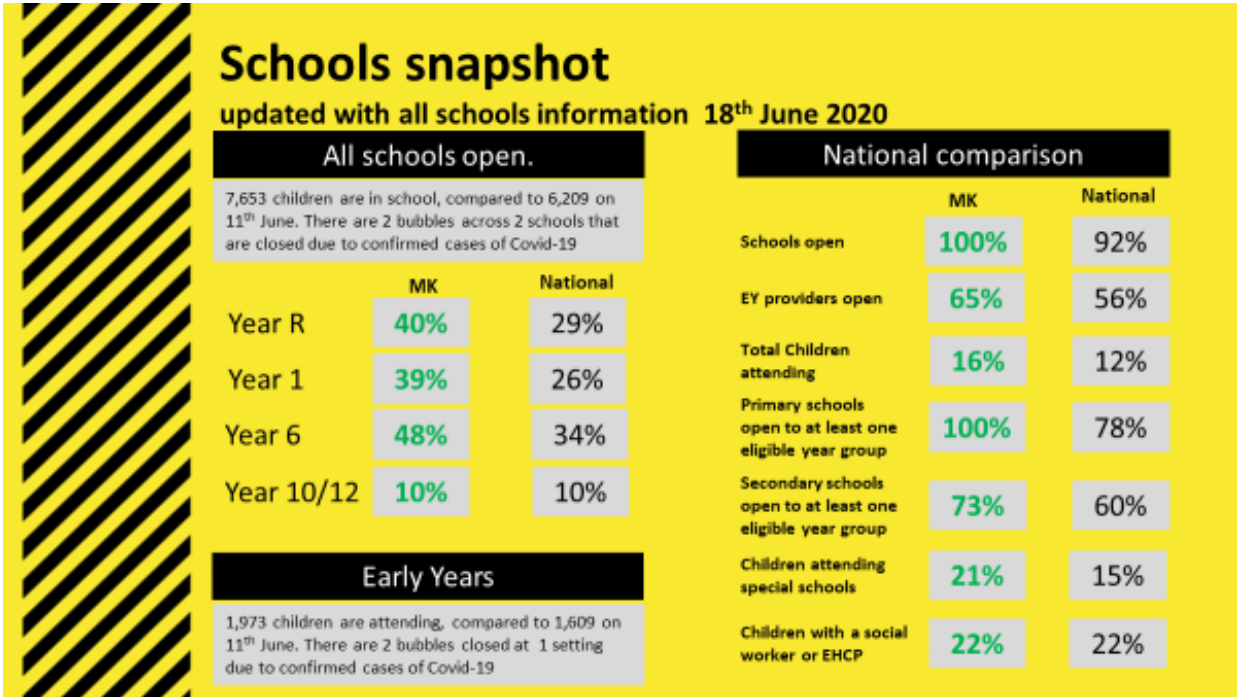
The teams have developed resources and guidance to support schools through the pandemic and are responding to requests from headteacher groups for further guidance and support on the wider opening of schools and September school provision.

Key themes for the next phase are:

- Transition points in the system and supporting children and schools.
- Impact on Disadvantaged and Vulnerable children and young people of schools' closure and potential areas to support schools in addressing issues that have arisen.
- Curriculum considerations and teaching and learning areas requiring refocus
- Staff and pupils' mental health and well being
- Safeguarding issues resulting from lockdown

It is an ongoing discussion for us as to the response to examinations being cancelled this year and how responses may be dealt with if schools/pupils are not awarded the grades they were expecting. There is also challenges for us as to how we best prepare our children and young people for their September destination.

**Current school Attendance**



Overall MK has managed throughout to show a higher level of attendance than nationally and have continued to review the detail, so we are clear as to the area of our focus. Below provides an overview of provision across our 112 schools for key worker children and vulnerable children during the Coronavirus for w/e 12/6/20.

Current	Schools	Compared to last week
2	Bubbles closed due to confirmed cases of Covid 19	0
2	Schools impacted with bubbles closed due to confirmed cases of Covid 19	0
112	Schools open with children	112

- The DFE estimate that 92% schools are open (18/6/2020), this compares to 100% of Milton Keynes schools.



## Snapshot of numbers

18/6/2020 children attending the following school phases.

	Nursery	Primary (R-6)	Secondary (7-11)	All-through	Special /Alt Ed	TOTAL	%	Previous week	%
NORMAL NOR	128	26391	14497	2488	857	48546		48546	
Total number of pupils attending establishment	59	6556	733	128	177	7653	15.7%	6209	12.7%
Total number of Reception pupils eligible to attend establishment	N/A	3645	N/A	60	15	3720	40%	3720	35.5%
Reception pupils attending establishment	N/A	1471	N/A	17	1	1489		1322	
Total number of Year 1 pupils eligible to attend establishment	N/A	3605	N/A	59	30	3694	38.9%	3694	33.9%
Year 1 pupils attending establishment	N/A	1417	N/A	17	2	1436		1254	
Total number of Year 6 pupils eligible to attend establishment	N/A	3815	N/A	30	68	3913	48%	3913	41.2%

Year 6 pupils attending establishment	N/A	1876	N/A	10	11	1882		1612	
Total number of Year 10 pupils eligible to attend establishment	N/A	N/A	2774	301	94	3169	11.1%	3169	10.4% (15 June)
Year 10 pupils attending establishment	N/A	N/A	321	13	17	351		330	
Total number of Year 12 pupils eligible to attend establishment	N/A	N/A	1616	130	65	1811	8.0%	1811	13.4% (15 June)
Year 12 pupils attending establishment	N/A	N/A	143	0	1	144		243	
Children with EHC plan (1401)	2	143	43	6	138	332	24%	303	21.6%
Children with a social worker (1714)	2	222	55	6	71	356	20.7%	321	18.7%
Children otherwise vulnerable (1457)	1	408	125	20	135	689	47.2%	529	36.3%
Children of critical workers (unknown)	3	1628	156	83	28	1898	N/A	1535	N/A

- The total numbers of children accessing school provision has continuously increased. This has been impacted on the return to school by Year 10 and Year 12.
- 15.7% of total MK school provision attend which is higher than national 12%, this compares to 12% in MK in the previous week and 9.1% nationally

- 100% MK primary schools are open to at least one of the eligible year groups.
- 73% MK secondary schools are open to at least one of the eligible groups,  
In total 97.3% MK schools were open to eligible year groups compared to 92% national. 21% attended MK special schools compared to national 12.2%, this compares to 21% in MK in the previous week and 13% national
- 5% attended MK secondary schools compared to national 4%, this compares to 1.5% in MK in the previous week and 1% national

## Comparison to National and MK

	Difference in MK to National	MK 18 June	National 18 June	MK 11 June	National 11 June
Schools open	5.3%	97.3%	92%	99%	92%
EYFS providers open	9%	65%	56%	62.4%	53%
Total children in attendance	4%	16%	12%	12.7%	9.1%
Children attending primary	5%	24%	19%	21%	15%
Children attending special schools	6%	21%	15%	21%	13%
Children attending secondary schools	1%	5%	4%	1.5%	1%
Children with a social worker attending and an EHCP	0%	22%	22%	20%	18%
Reception	11%	40%	29%	35.5%	22%
Year 1	13%	39%	26%	33.9%	20%
Year 6	14%	48%	34%	41.2%	26%

## Comparison in numbers attending

Number attending	Increase from 4 June	18 June	11 June	4 June
Total	2176	7653	6209	5477
Primary	1632	6615	5610	4983
Reception	297	1489	1322	1192
Year One	404	1436	1254	1032
Year Six	430	1882	1612	1452

## Early Years Providers

### Early years

The Early Years Alliance Report warned that the childcare sector is at risk of mass closures without urgent government intervention. New modelling from independent research agency Ceeda found that childcare providers in England were operating at average occupancy levels of just 37 per cent on June 8, compared to 77 per cent in spring 2019.

In our response in MK we have been working with our Early Years and Childcare providers in a similar way to schools over recent months, despite their costs not being covered in the same way. We know that many have repeatedly raised concerns about the financial pressures facing the sector and our calls to Government continue to provide additional funding at a national

level to protect childcare providers and to see them through this crisis. However, again in MK we have seen a good level of resilience from the sector.

**18 June 2020**

	<b>Group based early years providers</b>	<b>School based early years providers</b>	<b>Child minders</b>	<b>Total number</b>	<b>Total number for 11 June</b>
Total number of providers	119	35	137	291	298
open	86	29	74	189	186
closed	33	6	63	102	112
Planning to close	0	1	0	1	1

<b>Current</b>	<b>Settings</b>	<b>Compared to last week</b>
1	Bubbles closed due to confirmed cases of Covid 19	0
2	Setting impacted with bubbles closed due to confirmed cases of Covid 19	0

There are:

- 1973 children are accessing childcare, a continuing increase from the previous week of 1609.
- 668 are children of key workers, a continuing increase compared to 627 previous week.
- 107 are vulnerable children, a slight increase from 105.
- The DFE estimate that 56% EYFS providers were open on 18.06.2020 this compares to 64.9% of Milton Keynes EYFS providers. Previous week there were 53% providers open nationally compared to 62.4% MK
- There are sufficient places for all key worker and vulnerable children to attend.

We have continued to monitor throughout as to what we consider has worked well:

**Childminder support** • telephone support with Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory requirements • Specific, targeted face to face training following less than Good outcomes • Contribution to EMA early years network meetings and training • Twilight drop in sessions to strengthen effective EYFS practice • Telephone support/challenge deprivation funding action plans.

**Setting support** • Improvement Partner (IP) visits to include a joint leader observation with a focus on Ofsted actions • EY follow up feedback following visits • Visits to enhance environments for two-year-old eligible funded provision • Visits to support/challenge deprivation funding action plans

**All provision support** • Strong post inspection outcome processes which informs funding decisions • Post inspection action planning, support and challenge • Streamlining EY quality improvement processes • Access to and updated EY web page information • Access to Pre – EYFS registration advice and guidance and enquiries advice line.

**Wider MK team collaboration** • Children’s Centres (CC) and MKC Day Nurseries - Providing EYFS advice and guidance to CC leaders and managers. Intervention and Inclusion - Guided leaders delivered SEND conference workshops. EMA - Collaborated with EY consultant on joint EY training and network meetings. CLA - Provided EYFS training for early years LAC workers. Libraries - Begun collaboration in relation to EY place Golden Tickets and library membership

### **Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and children with a social worker**

- 24% children in MK with an EHCP were in attendance on the 18<sup>th</sup> June compared to the previous week 21.6%
- 20.7% children with a social worker are attending a school setting in MK compared to previous week of 18.7%
- The combined percentage of children with a social worker or with an EHCP in MK is 22% compared to national 22%. Last week there were 20% in MK compared to 18% national

### **Looked after children**

The numbers of looked after children attending school continues to increase with 123 looked after children in school from reception to year 11 compared to 117 children in the previous week. This equates to 48% of looked after children between 4-16 in attendance compared to 46% in the previous week.

### **Children of parents who are critical workers**

Nationally on the 18<sup>th</sup> June the DFE calculate that 13% of all children of critical workers were in attendance, up from 11% in the previous week. In Milton Keynes the number of children whose parents are critical workers attending has increased from 1535 to 1898.

### **Laptops**

Milton Keynes Council has secured almost 400 new laptops for children and young people via a national government scheme and the first delivery of 250 laptops arrived mid-June. The scheme aims to provide vulnerable young people with access to the internet for communication with their school or social worker. The laptops will also enable access to crucial educational resources and online learning.

The equipment is being distributed to children with social workers, those leaving care and disadvantaged Year 10 pupils. In all cases the laptops will be on loan from their school or direct from the council’s social care team, but we continue to consider with schools how children are able to receive blended learning and in some cases have work delivered to their homes if they do not have access to virtual learning.

## **School builds and School Place Planning**

It is identified that MK has surplus places in the Primary sector from September 2020 – 12 schools are identified as having more than 50% surplus places in Year R despite work being ongoing with the sector to contract. There is a projected significant surplus in the primary sector in the coming years and although positive in terms of parental preference, it may cause significant financial issues for schools.

The strategy to reduce surplus places across the system is therefore continuing to be progressed and discussions being undertaken on the longer-term strategy to manage future primary surplus.

## **Secondary School Place Planning**

As we note with the projection of our demography in MK we need to ensure the number of secondary school places keeps pace with our growing population in order to meet the Council's statutory duty to ensure a school place for every Milton Keynes child. This is working well across the secondary sector but there is a significant investment in time to ensure this success.

For Y7 admissions for September 2020 there are 57 vacancies remaining following the 2nd round offer day on 24 April 2020 which continued during lockdown. Our Access team reports 28 late applications received to date for the 3rd round, however some of these may include changes of preference.

Schools have the ability to offer over their Pupil Allocation Number (PAN) should they need to, and it is likely places will also become available through natural system movement enabling us to manage any additional late applications/in year admissions as needed. There are therefore currently sufficient places within the system, but this is closely monitored to balance need and capacity.

## **School Builds**

Over this lockdown period we have continued to progress as much as possible our preparedness for the new school builds required in MK. The new building planned for Watling Academy has continued to have a current agreed completion date of 14 December and the Contractor is progressing with work on site, staffing levels are increasing and bi-weekly progress meetings continue.

Watling Academy is therefore preparing to open as planned in September at the Fairfield contingency site. The extension is planned to complete in July and first floor to complete in August. Daily communication with school staff continues and progress is being made with the extension and remodelling of first floor to form a food tech room and science labs.

Glebe Farm, MK's first all-through school is also planned to be open in 2022. Over this period work has progressed to the design stage and the service continues to work with partners to ensure the capacity in our secondary school system is retained going forward.

## **Summary and Next Steps**

### **Rapid Reviews**

Throughout COVID-19 Children's Services has largely been able to retain services whilst prioritising the needs of children and families in Milton Keynes. This has however impacted the service in relation to higher cost placements having to be sought and, in some cases, services not being able to be delivered or be as effective as we would normally expect them to be. This has added to the financial challenge faced by public services. We therefore are aware that how we progress needs to ensure that we are targeted regarding focussing on the most vulnerable children within Milton Keynes. We are noting that some of our families are facing unprecedented challenges in regard to children not being at school for significant and prolonged period of time as well as the financial and job employment prospects of some of their families, contributing to the concerns and stresses they feel in the home. We are therefore considering how we optimise all our services within Children's Services to make the most difference for our vulnerable communities whilst maintaining services where we are able. To assist us in this decision-making we are undertaking reviews across a range of services.

The review methodology used will be using a PESTLE analysis. This is a recognised framework used to analyse the key factors and help inform the approach we make to as services going forward. The PESTLE will be utilised to focus on the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The domains it will include are:

- Economic: How is the current economic outlook impacting on the service?
- Social: What impact has COVID19 had on what customers want and how?
- Political: What matters right now locally and nationally?
- Technology: What can technology do for this service to make it safer?

In this way we hope to be able to give assurance as to our capacity to ensure continuous improvement in our services balancing performance and value and to realise the ambition of the council plan priorities. Alongside this work we are scoping, noting the work from other local authorities, as to the potential impact that Covid may bring. There are models that are projecting a significant increase in Children's Services child protection referrals from September when more children are likely to return to school and families will be emerging from some of the challenges lockdown has given. At this stage however this work is still largely hypothetical but as we continued to manage the risks and needs that we see across the surface we will plan to be as adaptable in responding in a timely and risk proportionate way.

It is hoped however that the Committee will be able to consider the work undertaken by the Service over this time and contribute their views as to the work undertaken and how we are positioning the service to meet future need.