

Important & Urgent Staff Circular for Children's Services 19 March 2020

Re: Business Continuity during COVID-19 /Coronavirus Pandemic

Colleagues

Following the latest advice from the government and the increasingly rigorous measures set out to delay the transmission of the disease, we have agreed plans to ensure that we can continue to provide essential services at this critical time.

These plans are intended to keep our staff healthy and safe whilst providing vital help, support and protection to children and families. This is in line with the National Guidance on social distancing and take into accounts those staff needing to work at home.

Our core and statutory work will continue but there will be changes to how this takes place given we will be operating with a reduced number of staff for a period.

We will be running a duty service based in Perceval House. This will consist of three 'duty' teams who will each work one week in three based at Perceval House. This means that all social work teams will be working on this rota basis. The duty worker will complete the work (to the end of the Child & Family Assessment) and then transfer the case, where appropriate to the regular MAST / Connect team.

All staff on the rota are members of staff confirmed as being able to be in work.

The team that is on duty will respond to referrals and provide a safeguarding service.

The two teams not based at Perceval House on duty will work from home carrying on their current caseloads. Those not involved in the duty teams will continue with their existing work but from home working to the following guidance.

Staff will be provided with further guidance and support from their line manager/Head of Service as required throughout this period as the situation is a fast changing one.

This is a rapidly changing landscape and we will update this guidance in line with National Guidelines.

Thank you again for your support, understanding and continued hard work during this very difficult time.

Carolyn Fair

Director of Children and Families

Judith Finlay

Executive Director Children, Adults and Public Health

Guidance Note 1: Visits and meetings

Visits to children, young people and parent/carers

Visits take place across the service to carry out assessments and to meet other statutory duties.

Underpinning all visits is the expectation that workers and managers work closely together to ensure that risks are addressed, and decisions clearly recorded with management oversight. This is essential at a time when usual practice is affected.

General expectations for visits

- A Manager needs to agree if a visit can be virtual or needs to be a physical visit
- The key function of visits is to ensure a child is safeguarded.
- All visits will need to be carried out in line with current timescales (except where agreed by a Head of Service)
- Visits will be carried out by the allocated worker if possible and if this can't happen, it will be done by a member of the 'Duty' team. The Team Manager should agree to this happening.
- Usual safeguarding risk assessments should take place
- Latest health and safety guidance should be followed (see OneSpace <https://ealingcouncil.sharepoint.com/pages/home.aspx>)

Carrying out visits – 3 Stage format (for all children, CIN, CP, LAC and Care Leavers and as part of any CFA)

When planning to visit for any reason the following three stages should be followed:

Stage 1: Regular physical visit

The Social Worker should telephone the parent/carer in advance of the planned visit to check whether they or any member of the household has any symptoms to suggest possible coronavirus or are already in self/household isolation or require social distancing. If this is the case, then the Social Worker should move to Stage 2 below. If all is reported as well the planned visit can go ahead.

Stage 2: Door-Step visit

If the parent/carer and child are in isolation the Social Worker should consider the possibility of a 'door-step' visit. This means that a physical visit can take place but the Social Worker should not enter the home, but speak with the child and parent/carer from a distance of 2 metres.

If it is considered inappropriate to carry out a 'door-step' visit then the Social Worker should move to Stage 3 below.

Stage 3: Virtual visit using facetime / skype or telephone

A virtual visit should take place only when it has been agreed by the Social Worker's Manager that a physical visit is not able to take place.

Face to Face Meetings at Perceval House

These should be no planned face to face meetings. In the exceptional circumstances that there is a 'walk in' e.g. care leavers, homeless families or young people involved in the Youth Justice System, there are designated rooms with a glass screen that can be used by a member of the duty team.

Guidance Note 2: Specific service operations and changes

Referrals and Assessments

- Child Protection referrals

The duty service based at Perceval House will respond to new child protection referrals, carry out visits and complete any assessments usually carried out by ECIRS and MAST.

- Child in Need referrals

These referrals will be allocated to the MAST teams as appropriate.

Looked After Children & Placements

A combined Adults and Children's Placements team has been set up - Commissioning Covid-19 Response (which includes officers from Contracts, Adults Safeguarding and the Art Team) and can be contacted on the usual ART number and email.

Where a child/young person is accommodated, they should continue to be accompanied to their placement by a Social Worker.

Where a child is placed with carers who are mildly unwell or in isolation, it is expected that the child will remain with their carers and be in household isolation with them if possible. Support will be offered to the carers and contact should be via door-step or virtual visit.

If a carer is too ill to undertake caring responsibilities, consideration should be taken as to who is best placed to care for the child, including potentially family members. Back up carers should be approached first and then extended family members of the foster carer/ others connected to the child. This would need to be a contact arrangement or reg 24 depending on circumstances. This should be discussed with a Head of Service. Risk assessments should be carried out.

If a placement is at risk of breakdown not due to illness, we will be looking to provide support to reduce the need for respite.

Emergency placements for young people who are aged 16 plus who are showing symptoms of Covid-19 are being commissioned – contact COVID-19 Commissioning team on the usual ART number.

Where a care leaver's placement becomes untenable a referral to ART should be made in the usual way.

Pre-Birth

A list of due dates of Unborn children open to Children's Services will be made available to the Duty team. Due to the increased vulnerability associated with pregnant women we will need to conduct visits in a way that balances the risk to the woman with the need to ensure planning for the unborn is informed. This will mean deciding with a manager on the type of visit needed.

Missing children

These children remain a priority group for safeguarding. They will be unable to self-isolate and unlikely to receive the medical attention they may require.

Where a child or young person goes missing the Social Worker should liaise with a Contextual Safeguarding Adviser re: next steps.

Homeless Children and Families

Homeless 16 & 17 year olds should be accommodated under s20 until the completion of an assessment with the agreement of a Head of Service.

Families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and Unaccompanied Minors should be dealt with as usual.

Should an unaccompanied child on the Croydon rota be symptomatic, Ealing will have the responsibility of finding an appropriate immediate placement.

Court work

The Family Courts are continuing to function, but this will undoubtedly change. Currently the Court workers will remain ring-fenced for active care proceedings and will not take part in the duty rota. This will be reviewed.

SAFE service

SAFE workers will work on their existing cases and identify cases to close. TAF meetings are unlikely to be held should all schools close. Key school contacts will need to be identified to enable virtual TAF meetings to be held to agree closure or ongoing plan if a need is high.

SAFE FSW workers will be expected to support the low level CIN work allocated to SW's in MAST teams whether on duty or WFH. If SAFE SW's receive work on the duty week they will follow through completion of this assessment.

New SAFE work will unlikely be referred and the SAFE service will be reviewed on a regular basis to look at the current demand and change in referral environment. If cases from SAFE escalate to Tier 3/4 and need section 17 or 47 assessment, this is to be undertaken by the SAFE Social worker.

Care Leavers:

Visits to care leavers should take place in line with the above 3 Stage format.

Where a care leaver living independently needs to self-isolate, a plan needs to be made to provide subsistence in the form of essentials and medicine for the period of isolation. Part of the plan will also need to include regular contact with the young person to provide emotional support to them at what will be an anxious time.

Foster Carer /Kinship/ Adoption visits

Visits should take place in line with the above 3 Stage format. If both a Supervising Social Worker and a child's Social Worker are due to visit, only one professional should attend the household to reduce footfall in the carers home. One record of the visit should be copied to both the child and carers file.

Contact

Contact will continue as usual, but parents and carers should be pre-called by the supervisor to ensure no-one is showing symptoms prior to children being picked up.

In the event of any party in isolation, phone calls, skype and facetime can be used with agreement of the allocated Social Worker.

Children with Disabilities (CWD)

Families with children with disabilities will come under rapidly increasing pressure with many community resources (including schools) becoming unavailable. CWD team social workers will remain ring-fenced to this cohort and will not take part in the duty rota.

Subsistence payments to care leavers and families

Payments should consider any additional costs to the family if self-isolating e.g. medicine, food and hygiene materials. Payments should be made in the usual way, where possible using BACS payments.

In emergencies providers can be asked to make additional payments to clients and these can be invoiced for.

Professionals Meetings

All meetings will move to being 'virtual' instead of face to face and in line with existing timescales.

This includes Child in Need Network meetings and reviews; Child Protection Conferences; LAC Reviews; Strategy meetings etc.

Additional guidance for the Child Protection Conference service will be provided.

Guidance Note 3: Staff supervision, team discussions and meetings

This guidance is service wide and covers all Statutory and Non- Statutory teams.

Guidance for conducting virtual meetings will be circulated to all staff and will be made available on the intranet.

Supervision

Managers and Deputy Team Managers are expected to carry out case supervision with their supervisees to existing timescales. This can be either face to face or virtual depending on circumstances.

Managers on duty will be expected to provide management direction to workers in the duty team who are dealing with referrals. A worker's regular manager will then take over case management.

Morning Meetings

The duty team at Perceval House should meet every morning to establish whether there is a full complement to the team and to review concerning cases.

Morning meetings take place first thing each morning virtually with those not involved in the Duty team based in Perceval House.

Heads of Service will meet with Team Managers from 9am to 9.30

Team Managers and Deputy Team Managers should meet from 9.30 to 10am.

Team Meetings

These will be replaced by a daily check-in meeting.

Panels

All Panels will continue to be held. There will be specific guidance and communication about how these are convened.

MOSAIC

Mosaic support will be unchanged with the IT team working virtually. There will be a senior IT manager on site each day and the team working remotely will be able to provide support during this period. Ken and Stephen are offering support online.