

Introduction

This report outlines the three substantial areas prioritised for improvement in children’s services, along with the cross-cutting enablers that will assist in securing the fast-paced, sustainable improvement required and provides an update as to our improvement progress in these areas. The three priority areas are:

- Children’s social care
- Services for children with additional needs (SEND)
- Services for children with emotional wellbeing and mental health needs.

The cross-cutting enablers are:

- Performance management
- Retention and professional development of staff
- Partnership working
- Managing the finances

The report also provides an update on the impact of Covid-19 on our service improvement, and on the outcomes of the most recent Ofsted Focused Visit (March 2021) and Annual Engagement Meeting (June 2021).

Children’s Social Care Improvement Update

1. Over the 2021-2022 period, all remaining transformation work planned as part of the Family Resilience programme is expected to be fully implemented. There are several work-streams that are continuing from last year along with some additional important projects that started in early 2021. This section of the report outlines the key updates since last reporting to Cabinet in January.
2. **Neglect:** Children’s services, along with the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) has identified the recognition of neglect and the response to children experiencing neglect across services as areas requiring further improvement – a position supported by the recent Ofsted Focused Visit. Neglect continues to be the most common category of harm for children subject to child protection plans in Surrey. Developing colleagues’ skills in working with families where neglect is an issue is an important aspect of their professional development. Following a pilot programme last year, we are in the process of implementing the Graded Care Profile 2.0 (GCP2) assessment tool. This will be used by social care and – because this is a multi-agency area of work requiring a partnership approach – by multi-agency practitioners to better identify and respond when there are concerns about the quality of a child’s care in the family home. GCP2 Practitioner training continues to be delivered for our own staff and colleagues in partner agencies, and the centralised recording system for GCP2 has recently gone live. There are now 25 GCP2 Champions from across all areas of the safeguarding partnership who are helping to embed this tool into practice within their services and helping to develop specialist guidance for practitioners.
3. **Children with Disabilities (CWD) Services:** The Ofsted Focused Visit highlighted the need to improve management oversight and case planning, safeguarding practice and the timeliness and quality of plans for Children in Need. A decision has been made to accelerate improvement in this area through an increase in leadership capacity. We have appointed an interim Assistant Director for CWD, who is leading on an immediate review

of the service and will provide both operational and strategic oversight of the service. This will in due course become an established post and we will move to permanent recruitment.

4. A tighter focus on performance in this area led of an intensive review of the CWD service in April - by the Quality Assurance services and the recently appointed Assistant Director for CWD. This looked at the key challenges and identified three performance management priorities:
 - a. A review of all children currently open to the CWD service over the next 6-8 weeks to assess whether children are supported through the right plan, to determine levels of neglect, parental mental health issues, domestic abuse and substance misuse and to ensure children and young people are being given the right support based on their disability needs.
 - b. An audit of staffing in CWD including a complete skills audit and a recruitment drive to address the high level (43%) of interim workers.
 - c. Strengthening practice with a ‘back to basics’ approach, setting clear expectations and ‘practice guidance’ to shift the culture from a focus on the adults in the family and provision of packages of support to one where the focus is on the needs of the child and the social work role ensures the right levels of intervention to enable change. This will lead to more focused and robust supervision, improving the quality of assessment in maintaining a focus on the child, evidencing how this informs the plan and the child’s outcomes.
5. **The Family Safeguarding Model** – as previously reported to Cabinet - brings together under one roof all the professionals needed to help children and to support families and this ground-breaking approach has proved highly successful in other authorities around the country. This has been in place in Surrey since 2019 and we are now working with a partner agency, York Consulting, on a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation and understanding of the model across our teams to identify the strengths and areas for improvement associated with it. The evaluation will gather feedback and learning from frontline practitioners, families and young people and will also track outcomes for those we work with over a year-long period, culminating in an overall report which will be published in 2022. To help further embed the Motivational Interviewing (MI) techniques, which are key to this practice model, we have created two new MI Practice Lead posts for this year to support the professional development of our practitioners, managers and leaders, building their skills and confidence in the use of Motivational Interviewing. The Family Safeguarding Model is also being rolled out nationally as part of the [‘Strengthening Families, Protecting Children \(SFPC\) Programme’](#) with six further local authorities currently implementing it; the positive impact this model has on the lives of children and families is further highlighted by the Department for Education’s continued support to local authorities to roll out this innovative programme in their own areas.
6. **Risk Management for young people:** A ‘Joining the Dots’ strategic group has been established to develop a clear vision and consistent practice model and adopt innovative and smarter ways of managing risk and safeguarding adolescents and young people involved with the Youth Offending Service. This is another area of multi-agency partnership working. The aim of this activity is to ensure we are a county where all partners see children as children first (especially when they are involved with the youth justice system), treat them fairly and help them to build on their strengths to ensure they

achieve the best possible outcomes and transition to a successful adulthood. A number of dedicated task and finish groups have recently been established and are being overseen by the Safeguarding Adolescents Strategic Board.

7. **Quality Assurance:** We are now over two years since the implementation of the monthly case audit programme and although we have seen compliance improve, we know there is further work to be done on improving the quality of some of our audits and to shift our focus more towards using audits to evaluate the impact of our practice on children and outcomes for them, rather than process. To achieve this shift in our performance culture, the Quality Assurance Service has made some key changes to our programme including our range of reporting, audit and moderation programme alongside introducing a refreshed version of our audit tool. A programme of practice observations was introduced in April 2021 which allows for managers to undertake a direct observation of a key safeguarding activity on a regular basis. It is vitally important that we continue to drive improvements in the quality of audits as they are an essential part of improving practice for the children involved.
8. **Workforce:** As reported in January, we have a comprehensive plan to develop our workforce strategy and improve our offer to potential and existing employees. We know that in service areas where retention is poor, the turnover of staff affects children and families abilities to develop positive work relationships that will effect change. This programme is therefore seeking to: Identify the key issues and root causes affecting retention; Address key concerns identified through feedback and insights; Implement sustainable schemes that will enable improved employee experience. We are nearing the end of ‘Phase 2’ – developing and implementing new approaches – and have already seen a noticeable impact on our workforce with improved retention and overall social worker staffing levels at the highest they’ve been at any point in the last 18 months and staff turnover rates reducing from a high of 28% in February 2020 to under 13% in the last month. Our initiatives in ‘Phase 3’ (Jun-Sep 2021) and ‘Phase 4’ (Oct-Dec 2021) include the launch of a new continuing professional development package to support staff professional development, an ‘Aspiring Managers & Practice Experts Programme’, an Academy talent pipeline, succession planning workshops, ongoing events & promotions to attract skilled social workers, ongoing employee-led cultural development and the implementation of a permanent ‘Staff Retention Group’. This will enable us to retain, develop and attract the best staff to Surrey and to cultivate a culture that is positive, supportive and meets the needs of our practitioners and managers. The strong link between professional development and retention will over time enable us to have a more stable and highly skilled workforce.
9. **No Wrong Door:** Following the report to Cabinet in January 2021 from the Members’ Reference Group, we continue to develop a local ‘No Wrong Door’ service, a well-evaluated short term residential model that was first developed in North Yorkshire in 2015. This offers an integrated approach to supporting some of the most vulnerable teenagers who are either in care, or at risk of coming into care. This is another important area of partnership working. North Yorkshire County Council began formally supporting our implementation from 1 April 2021 and partners (Surrey Police, health commissioners and providers) are signed up to being part of the model. Implementation will be alongside the wider multi-agency Safeguarding Adolescents service development. Again, this new model requires an investment in professional development, so staff have begun to receive training and have taken the opportunity to provide some outreach services to children and families during the last national lockdown. Development of the service is

overseen by an operational board and there is good commitment and attendance from all stakeholders. Work is beginning on young people’s involvement in developing the service. An options appraisal identified that Cheyne Walk, Horley would be recommended as the first No Wrong Door Hub due to its current occupancy, leadership, staffing and current standing with Ofsted.

10. **Single View of a Child:** This is an ambitious IT systems change which will support the improvement of practice by enabling a single view of the child across multiple IT systems. It will not only improve performance management by enabling the planning, reviewing and monitoring of caseloads, but as a wider transformation programme will also allow professionals across the span of Education and Children’s Services to spend more time with children and their families through reduced time and effort to access key information across multiple IT systems. Professionals will be able better to understand the whole of a child’s journey and ensure sustainable high-quality evidence-based interventions and support that will meet children’s needs, particularly the most vulnerable. It will also enable users to accurately record, analyse and project costs. The main projects are the Early Years Education System (EYES) project and The Liquidlogic Integrated Finance Technology (LIFT) project. The professional development to support the EYES project is continuing with workshops for CCIS, Early Years and Free School Meals, whilst preparation has been powering up for the data migration and user acceptance testing for the first phase. This includes the first configuration release of the EYES system, invitations sent to testers for a preparation workshop and their actual test days (commencing 1st June). The LIFT system, which will significantly improve our financial management, particularly in relation to complex care packages, has been progressing the user acceptance test (phase one) for Allowances and Fostering, with great results and minimum defects being raised (1259 tests and only 14 defects). This first phase is due to go live August 2021. Initial configuration has already started for the first build for the SEN service, which is phase two of the project, going live in autumn 2021.
11. **L-SPA & C-SPA Integration:** We are continuing to merge the Children’s Single Point of Access (C-SPA) and the Learners Single Point of Access (L-SPA) to ensure there is one route for families to contact us, where there is a concern about the child or young person’s needs, whether safeguarding, Early Help, learning and/or developmental needs. With the appointment of the Integration Programme Manager earlier this year and recruitment for the remaining specialist roles well underway, the L-SPA/C-SPA Governance Board has been reinstated and a short-term review of the L-SPA since being implemented in 2020 has been commissioned to ensure we address any issues and build on best-practice ways of working within the new integrated model. Once fully implemented later this year we will be in a better position to support families at an earlier point, which is usually both a lower cost and more effective in meeting families goals, and to encourage professionals who request support to identify what broader help and services may be required, looking at the needs through a multi-disciplinary, whole children’s services lens.
12. **Children’s Residential Homes – Capital Investment Programme:** Surrey County Council is committed to ensuring that the environment of our residential children’s homes is the best it can possibly be. We are aware that some of the current children’s homes are larger than we need and are not best situated to provide a sustainable home. Current best practice suggests that the best homes for our children are family sized and look like the homes of their peers. We agree with Ofsted’s recommendations that children should

grow up in family-sized units and our investment programme will enable this to be realised. In July 2020, two new homes and the rebuild of our family centre were approved whilst a third was approved in Spring 2021. Each Children’s Home will accommodate 4 children in domestic, residential settings, and one will be a second No Wrong Door hub with a 2-bed self-contained annex for respite/emergency provision. The development will provide homes which:

- a. Enable a safe and more homely environment for children
- b. Enable proper staff supervision of all areas of the home
- c. Maximise occupancy and the placement stability of the home by being able to match a smaller group of children with each other
- d. Assist in our financial management by reducing running costs through provision of small purpose-built manageable units with modern building efficiency, rather than large old buildings which require significant maintenance – thereby releasing funding to enable greater spend on services for children in care.

Ofsted – Focused (Assurance) Visit

13. As reported to Cabinet in January, Ofsted set out their interim plans for a phased return to routine inspections earlier this year with the interim arrangements including visits to a number of local authorities to assess the quality and impact of decision making throughout the pandemic.
14. On 24 - 25 March 2021, Ofsted carried out a ‘Focused Visit’ to Surrey services, where the inspection team spent their time on case sampling, interviews with practitioners and managers, gaining feedback from foster carers, schools, the judiciary and other partner agencies. Initial verbal feedback from the Lead Inspector told us that we showed a good understanding of ourselves which was reflected in our self-evaluation and that their findings were largely reflecting back to us what we had shown them we already know.
15. The [full report](#) was published by Ofsted on Tuesday 11 May 2021. The findings from this visit are summarised below:
 - a. We have responded well to COVID-19, whether by managing the increased demand at the front door, returning as soon as possible to face-to-face visits, working hard to promote contact between children in our care and their families, or securing additional staff to keep caseloads relatively low. Multi-agency forums and links with community groups were created and strengthened to ensure that the needs of children and their families were identified and responded to. Social workers have continued to visit children regularly throughout the pandemic, face to face or virtually, according to their level of risk or need.
 - b. There was evidence that the quality of social work practice and multi-agency working tended to lead to positive experiences for children who are subject to Child in Need and Child Protection Plans, however, this was not yet consistent enough for all children and there is evidence of over-optimism by professionals regarding parental capacity to change or sustain improvements which for some children has resulted in multiple interventions.
 - c. The introduction of the Family Resilience model and the creation of the Children’s Single Point of Access (C-SPA) is contributing to effective multi-agency information-sharing and application of thresholds. The new model of working is

providing effective family interventions so that children can remain at home whenever safe and possible for them to do so. It is positive that the inspectors recognised that our approach “has continued to develop throughout the pandemic, and there are early indicators that this approach is effective at keeping some families together.”

- d. There were times when our work was not well evidenced on files – for example when we have looked for alternative registered placements before placing children in unregulated settings such as semi-independent accommodation for young people in care aged over 16.
- e. The inspectors recognised that while most children are in appropriate placements to meet their needs, overall sufficiency of placements remains a challenge and this has meant that some children have experienced placement moves; a situation exacerbated by COVID-19.
- f. Our extensive quality assurance and auditing programme coupled with the availability and use of detailed performance information gives senior leaders good oversight of – and grip on – the quality of social work practice. This in turn, enables us to identify patterns, including service strengths as well as areas for improvement, and this continues to shape improvement plans.
- g. Our response to the pandemic and its impact on our staff was also commended with social workers reporting feeling well supported during the pandemic with regular check-ins to monitor their welfare, risk assessments updated to support their safety and good access to PPE.

16. We know there is more to do to continue improving our services and Ofsted highlighted three areas of social work practice in their feedback about the visit:
 - Management oversight and case planning in the Children with Disability service
 - The analysis of risk and planning for children experiencing long-term neglect
 - Case records of how placements are matched with children’s needs.
17. Further information is included elsewhere in this report about the improvement programme and the significant projects already underway. The ‘Getting to Good’ programme reported to Cabinet in January continues, because it is demonstrably driving the improvements we need. We have also initiated some additional work to sharpen our focus on the key priority areas highlighted above.

Services for children with additional needs (Transforming SEND)

18. Services for children with additional needs have been a focus for improvement for several years, since an Area SEND inspection in 2016 resulted in a ‘Written Statement of Action’ (WSOA). In early 2021 the Department for Education confirmed that the remaining requirements of that WSOA had been met, and they were no longer monitoring our progress. However, it remains the case that there is further work to do to better meet the needs of Surrey’s children and to support their families, at the same time as managing down a significant overspend in the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

19. In this past year, Cabinet agreed £79million of capital investment in 1,600 new specialist places so that Surrey children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) could be educated closer to home. This focus on enabling children to have their needs met locally is better for children and for family life and is also often more cost effective than having to travel outside the county for independent educational provision. The capital investment is therefore an important element of our financial management in children’s services.
20. The new places that have already been created have meant that the vast majority of children with SEND received their offer of a place for academic year starting September 2021 by the national deadline. This gives families peace of mind and creates the conditions for a successful transfer to the next phase of learning.
21. Alongside this, a number of practice improvements have been made which have also improved the experience of children and families. Improved performance management of the completion of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) means that the timeliness of agreeing EHCPs has improved to a rolling average of 73% completed on time, compared to a national average of 58%.
22. There has also been a corresponding improvement in the timeliness of annual reviews and a focus on using these as a key point for preparations for adulthood. Both these advances mean that more children are receiving appropriate support for their needs earlier.
23. In a partnership development, school leaders, supported by the Council, are driving forward a new approach to inclusion in mainstream schools for children with additional needs. There is a clear vision and purpose to this work – which is gaining traction with schools and settings across the county – that recognises that ‘Inclusion is at the heart of a school’s work’. The focus is on a new strategy for equality, diversity and inclusion, better identification of additional needs, training and support for school staff to meet needs and learning from good practice in Surrey and beyond. This is a true partnership approach, based on evidence of what works for creating inclusive schools.
24. The drive of school leaders for inclusion is supported by the ‘Team around the School’. Again, this partnership-based new way of working brings services together with schools in an integrated and co-ordinated way to provide support to meet the complex needs of children, young people and families at earlier stages. The impact of this should be that crisis points are prevented, such as permanent exclusion from school, going into care, placement breakdown or mental health crises. There should also be a reduction in the need for specialist interventions or statutory assessments. The Team around the School is being piloted in the Summer term for wider roll out in the new academic year.

Services for children with emotional wellbeing and mental health needs

25. Services for children with emotional wellbeing and mental health needs remain an area of priority concern for the Council. This is one element of our work with children and families which is facing the most pressure and where the most work is needed to improve children and families’ experiences.

26. The pandemic has had a significant impact on the number of requests to Children and Young People’s Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing Services (often traditionally referred to as CAMHS); who have worked hard to respond effectively given the significant additional pressures. National benchmarking data shows that CAMHS has experienced a 22% increase in demand above the same time last year.
27. Services and system now face the challenge of meeting children’s needs in a context of some backlogs, continued demand and surge demand at the same time as embedding the new Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing contract which started on 1st April. From a financial management point of view, this new contract includes circa £6m of additional investment (equally provided by the CCGs and the County Council) over 7 years, with an option to extend for a further 3 years. Again, this is an investment both in better outcomes for children, but also in ensuring that needs can be met through lower cost interventions. It has a new focus on early intervention and prevention which means much more engagement with schools and third sector partners in ensuring children and families have early access to information, advice and help well before a clinical response is needed.
28. Set out below are the performance management actions taken to deliver the three priorities to reduce backlogs and waiting times, find new ways of meeting demand and mobilise the new services.

- a. Reducing backlogs** - There have been improvements in the backlogs within the Neurodevelopmental Pathway (including ASD). Additional capacity has been bought in from external organisations, Helios and Psi-con, who have provided online assessments, additional staff have been recruited with further recruitment underway. The completed diagnosis rates planned are on target for 1500 by end of August.
- To date 1,152 children from the backlog of 1,512 waiting for a neuro-developmental assessment are engaged with a provider now.
 - 414 of the 1,152 children have completed ASD assessments with a further 44 children in the initial process of screening to identify the most appropriate provider.
- b. Waiting Times** - There continues to be an increase in requests for support, as well as increases in those being clinically screened as urgent. To respond to this demand, capacity is being increased and the model is being reviewed. New agency staff have been recruited, procedures are being reviewed in partnership with voluntary sector partners and an action plan is being confirmed and permanent recruitment processes have been implemented. There were more requests for support at 353 requests for support than cases closed at 210 requests.
- CAMHS caseload had increased from 1812 in previous week to 1922
 - Incoming calls to the team continue during April 21 were between 210 and 409 per week.

The Alliance engaged external support (Carnall Farrar) to complete a demand and capacity exercise, including a detailed backlog analysis and develop phased action plans with a trajectory towards backlog reduction. The output of this work is now being tested before plans are ratified.

- c. Responding to demand** - CAMHS crisis services continue to support the most vulnerable who present with high risk behaviour and help avoid Emergency

Department attendance or acute hospital admissions. In May a new dedicated advice line for children and young people in crisis was launched. [Crisis admission avoidance: Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust \(sabp.nhs.uk\)](https://www.sabp.nhs.uk). The Wellbeing for Education Return grant has also been used to support schools and children and young people through the pandemic by enhancing the Compassionate Schools Programme (training and support), increasing support to 0 – 19 advice line, providing additional counselling support into L-SPA and increasing support through two further CWP staff.

- d. Mobilising the new services** - System wide training, service mapping and communities of practice have been developed to strengthen the implementation of the Thrive Framework for System Change. Thrive is the practice model that underpins the new service. This removes the ‘tiers’ and eligibility/levels of severity and focuses on goals of children, young people & families and the types of support they would like rather than what an ‘expert’ tells them. This is being implemented across health, education, social care and third sector and will strengthen everyone’s contribution to keeping children and young people resilient and improve emotional wellbeing and mental health.

29. Feedback has been positive about the service model and the direction of travel in terms of implementation. Key stakeholders involved in the series of reference groups with schools, primary care, safeguarding, SEND, Vulnerable Learners, Children and Young People Group and Family Voice are reporting that they are more engaged in co-designing the services than in the previous contract.

Cross-cutting themes

30. Woven through this range of service improvements in all three areas are some core cross-cutting themes that the improvement work will engage in every part of the improvement programme. Enhancement in these domains will improve both the pace and long-term sustainability of our improvements. These are:
- a. Performance – how we use management information to understand changes in performance and to select which areas to prioritise for further development. We are fortunate to have an abundance of accurate management information about our performance in most areas, but the sheer volume of data sometimes obscures those areas which most need attention. Refining the way that we use our management information will enable us to identify adjustments and fine tuning to our improvement programme more quickly. We also need to improve access to performance information from partner agencies where they are responsible for service delivery.
 - b. Retention – the need for a stable workforce which can build relationships with the children, young people and families we support. Research shows that the relationship between practitioner and family is one of the most important factors in securing sustainable change. Building a workforce that is committed to Surrey’s children and families and wants to stay working for the Council and with our residents is vital. This links to...
 - c. Professional Development – which is closely linked to retention. The scale of Surrey affords excellent opportunities for practitioners in a range of professional disciplines to learn, develop and progress while continuing to work for the Council. Ensuring that we have clear, well-established, fairly

applied and accessible professional development pathways, especially in ‘shortage’ roles will help us to embed the new practice models as managers and leaders are increasingly drawn from our own teams and retain organisational knowledge and understanding. Throughout this report reference has been made to the professional development of practitioners in embedding the new practices and improvements.

- d. Partnerships – throughout this report partners such as schools, police, health and voluntary sector have been mentioned. The improvements we need to secure cannot be achieved without their support and engagement, and as we improve, this also benefits their own organisational interests. Our investment of time and energy in developing true collaboration with our organisational partners will accelerate our improvement progress. As well as professional partners, our partnership with the families we work with is also crucial. Families are more likely to stick to a plan they have had a hand in developing, and working with them, rather than doing things to them or for them will help embed our new practice models. Approaches such as Family Safeguarding and iThrive are built on this way of thinking.
- e. Managing the finances – some of the most significant financial risks faced by the Council relate to the challenges caused by demand pressures in children’s social care, services for children with additional needs and services for children with emotional wellbeing and mental health needs. The legacy of poor practice in these areas also contributes to budget pressures and overspends. We are clear that improving the capacity of our services to engage in much more prevention and early intervention, and improving the quality of our statutory services to ensure that families receive the right help at the right time, will also help us to avoid the costs associated with ‘failure demand’. Service improvement is compatible with reduced costs over time.

Impact of COVID-19 on Children’s Services

31. Since the last update to Cabinet in January, arrangements across frontline children’s services largely remain the same with both frontline and support staff being asked to work in offices and the community where required to enable services to function effectively. Face-to-face visits to children and families continue to be our default approach in line with [national guidance](#), and any significant changes to frontline practice over the coming months – if required – continue to need approval from the Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning. We have not needed to enact contingency planning arrangements for any service since February 2021.
32. Demand across children’s services remains high with the number of contacts to the Children’s Single Point of Access (C-SPA) being at the highest they have been over the last year with 5,099 contacts received in March – an increase of 37% from the month before. The volume decreased to 4,420 in April although this is still significantly higher than the same time last year (3,436 contacts) and more recent weeks have seen a further increase. As expected, and as previously reported to Cabinet, the return of children to schools in March contributed to the recent surge in demand. However, the arrangements we put in place have ensured that work continues to progress in a timely way. A small reduction in the number of Assessments and Child Protection Conferences being completed within timescales

last month highlights the ongoing challenges to maintenance of high standards and the impact of the continued high demand on practice improvements.

33. The number of children in care in Surrey remains stable at approximately 1000 however the number of children who are the subject of Child Protection Plans has risen again for the tenth consecutive month to 938 at the end of April; this compares with 696 at the same time last year. This increase is in line with increases nationally throughout the pandemic, and Surrey’s numbers of children who are the subject of Child Protection Plans remains lower than the regional and national average, but this work is some of the most complex, demanding and labour intensive across the service.
34. Throughout this period of local and national lockdowns and the wider impact from COVID-19, our focus has continued to be on delivering the essential work to support Surrey’s residents, to safeguard children and to maintain consistency across frontline services wherever possible. We have mitigated the impact on services for residents in a number of ways:
 - f. Using additional funding specifically to mitigate the impact from COVID-19 to add capacity to the most affected frontline teams in the short to medium-term.
 - g. In-depth scenario and contingency planning in the early stages of the pandemic to ensure resources were in place when needed. Shifting staff to support critical services with flexibility to respond to increased workload at short notice.
 - h. Working virtually where needed – taking a risk based and child-focused approach in line with national guidance to avoid drift and delay with support for children and their families.
 - i. Working with Police and Health colleagues to reduce the lower level contacts to the C-SPA; close partnership working is key to help manage the contacts to children’s services. We engaged the support of the Surrey Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (SSCP) to work with partners throughout.
 - j. Quickly implemented enhanced reporting functionality to ensure contingency plans were regularly updated and enable us to shift resources at short notice.
 - k. Regular operational and strategic meetings with key managers, supporting staff and partners with escalation routes to multi-agency oversight groups and the Local Resilience Forum (LRF).
 - l. Quickly established a method of distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to frontline staff – working alongside the LRF to ensure that sufficient supplies were available.
 - m. Creating an enhanced 24/7 response – with youth workers, additional social workers, family group conference and CAMHS joining the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) to provide face to face support for families in crisis.
 - n. Regular communication to parents and carers regarding home learning, mental health support and ‘stay safe’ measures; targeted communication to parents and carers with a child with Special Educational Needs (SEN).
 - o. Worked with all providers and utilised the ‘provider support fund’ to ensure their supply chain and risk assessments were in place to maintain high quality provision for children.
 - p. Developed a system to ensure that Early Years children, especially vulnerable children, were included in the Winter Food Programme during Christmas, Spring half term, Easter and Summer half term and supported Early Years settings to deliver food vouchers.
35. The majority of frontline children’s services staff received their first dose of the vaccine in January/February and most have now also received their second dose

following significant effort this year to coordinate the programme for SCC staff and partner agencies via the Local Resilience Forum (LRF).

36. We continue to keep staff safety and wellbeing at the forefront of our service planning and managers are conducting regular risk assessments to ensure staff are safe while carrying out critical frontline services. Children’s services staff have access to local asymptomatic testing and have the PPE needed to carry out their roles in line with national guidance.
37. There is currently a high degree of uncertainty regarding the ongoing need for additional resources employed as part of our response to COVID-19. With demand still unusually high across children’s services, any reduction in resource may lead to reduced capacity and higher caseloads. We expect the impact of the pandemic to continue to affect demand across children’s services, with increased pressures for at least the next 10 months.

Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting

38. In June 2021 the CFLL Leadership Team met with Ofsted inspectors for our ‘Annual Conversation’ (or Annual Engagement meeting). The annual conversations take place alongside the Monitoring Visit inspection routine – it is not a replacement for any visits or inspections and all local authorities hold this meeting each year.
39. This meeting covered general updates from children’s social care, education and services for children with additional needs, with a focus on the impact of COVID-19, changes to frontline practice since last year and planning for the return to more normal working. The main emphasis of the discussions was our work to support children with additional needs, in particular our SEND Transformation Programme, and the work that has taken place throughout the pandemic to ensure vulnerable children are supported to be in school or to access education.
40. The findings from the recent Focused Visit – and our response to those findings (including the recommendations listed in paragraph 11) – were also discussed, with Directors able to provide assurance that recommended actions from the Focused Visit were already in hand.
41. There was a brief discussion about future Ofsted inspections. Inspections of children’s social care are not scheduled in advance, but a general indication was given that Surrey could expect a full inspection under the ILACS (“Inspecting Local Authority Children’s Services”) framework between Autumn 2021 and Spring 2022. There are no further Area SEND inspections in the programme for Surrey under the current framework. A new framework is expected to be implemented by Ofsted in 2022, and Surrey – having been inspected early on under the last framework, is likely to be early on the schedule for any new framework.

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