

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL****CABINET****DATE: 26 JANUARY 2021****REPORT OF: MRS MARY LEWIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES****LEAD OFFICER: RACHAEL WARDELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING****SUBJECT: CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT UPDATE****ORGANISATION STRATEGY  
PRIORITY  
AREA: EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES**

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**SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

This report provides an update on the improvement of Surrey's children's services and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the improvement programme and the delivery of frontline services. This provides further information on the services and activity outlined in the last report to Cabinet on 23 June 2020.

Following the major restructure of children's services completed in 2019, the Family Resilience improvement programme has continued in 2020 throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and while some resources have shifted to support other parts of the service, improving frontline practice is critical and it therefore remains a priority for the CFLLC directorate. The improvement programme is in the final year of delivery and is embedding the new ways of working to ensure profound and rapid improvements to children's services in Surrey so that all children in the county receive the right help at the right time.

Since the last report in July, the next iteration of the improvement plan - the 'Getting to Good' plan - has been developed and this goes beyond the inspection findings from 2018; Effective Family Resilience is an entirely new practice model and therefore a more ambitious and innovative improvement plan is required.

Despite continuing to drive improvement, the Covid-19 pandemic has inevitably had a major impact on delivery of frontline services – for this reason, the first section of this report (paragraphs 1 to 14) outlines the impact of the pandemic and the current pressures across the services.

The increases in demand and workload coming into the service, the challenges we have around staffing compounding the workload issue and the practical difficulties in delivering frontline services during a pandemic are all affecting day-to-day work across children's services. Despite this we are continuing to fulfil our statutory safeguarding obligations however the impact cannot be underestimated and as the situation continues, we may see the quality and timeliness of social work practice deteriorate. While recognising this is a possibility, we are doing everything we can to mitigate the impact and ensure we can maintain the high standards of practice across services.

The challenges related to the pandemic are at a time when we are in the middle of a major transformation and improvement programme in Surrey. This cannot stop due to its importance in improving services and we are anticipating a full re-inspection from Ofsted in 2021 – it does however mean that we may need to prioritise our efforts across the improvement work-streams.

This report supports the ‘Empowering Communities’ priority objective of the refreshed Organisation Strategy. The overall aims of the children’s improvement programme and the model of practice in Surrey – ‘Effective Family Resilience’ – are that all children in the county receive the right help at the right time to enable them and their families to develop resilience to face future life challenges independently.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Acknowledges the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, the risks highlighted in this report as a result of these challenges and the actions being taken to continue focussing on delivery of frontline services,
2. Receives a further report in spring 2021 – to include an update on the children’s improvement activity and the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the response from Surrey’s children’s services.

#### **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Following the suspension of routine Ofsted inspections in March 2020 due to COVID-19, the HMCI (Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector) has now outlined the interim plans for a phased return to routine inspections. Surrey’s children’s services look forward to hosting Ofsted for a Focussed Visit between January and March 2021 and will welcome feedback on how the local authority has supported children, young people and families throughout the pandemic.

The routine national inspection activity is expected to resume from April 2021; this was re-confirmed following the November/December ‘lockdown’ with further detail available on the [GOV.UK website](https://www.gov.uk). We are anticipating a full re-inspection of Surrey’s children’s services later in 2021.

#### **DETAILS:**

##### **Impact of Covid-19 on Children’s Services**

##### **Children’s Services, further ‘Lockdowns’ and Tier 4 restrictions:**

1. The second national lockdown from November to December 2020 presented additional challenges for the delivery of children’s services however arrangements were put in place quickly to reduce the impact. Throughout this period, our focus 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.
2. Following updates from Government in the final two weeks of December, all of Surrey moved into Tier 4 Covid alert level. All residents living in Tier 4 must stay at home other than where necessary, such as for work, education or medical treatment and residents must not leave a Tier 4 area or stay overnight away from home. For frontline children’s services, working arrangements 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. However, the overall high infection levels in and around Surrey and the re-introduction of shielding advice (applicable to Tier 4 areas) is inevitably having an impact on staffing levels across services.

3. The subsequent national lockdown beginning 5 January 2021 is likely to further impact children's services and we are continuing to work closely with other services and partner agencies to respond to the effects of these new restrictions. The latest [national guidance for children's social care services](#) highlights the key principles that will continue to underpin our work during these exceptional times:
  - **Child-Centred** - Promoting children's best interests: nothing is more important than children's welfare; children who need help and protection deserve high-quality and effective support as soon as a need for help is identified;
  - **Risk-Based** - Prioritising support and resources for children at greatest risk;
  - **Family-Focused** - Harnessing the strengths in families and their communities;
  - **Evidence-Informed** - Ensuring decisions are proportionate and justified;
  - **Collaborative** - Working in partnership with parents and other professionals;
  - **Transparent** - Providing clarity and maintaining professional curiosity about a child's wellbeing
4. We have continued to restore services through 2020 with most up and running in a 'normal way' (under Covid-19 restrictions) and nearly all of our children and families have continued to be seen face to face rather than virtually - in line with government guidance. As of 18 December 2020, 82% of Looked After Children have been visited (face to face) within timescales, 73% of children subject of a Child Protection Plan and 67% of children subject of a Child in Need Plan.
5. We have been supporting the reopening of Surrey schools, colleges and early years settings (prior to the new national lockdown beginning on 5 January 2021) for all children since September, providing guidance on risk assessments and what to do in the event of symptomatic staff or pupils. Close partnership working through SAfE, the schools-led improvement partnership, has been important to develop catch-up programmes for children who have fallen behind in their learning and development as a result of Covid-19. Overall, the joint working between Surrey's education and children's services alongside schools across the county, has helped ensure vulnerable children are able to attend school throughout the 'lockdowns' and other restrictions due to Covid-19; vulnerable children in Surrey were 3 times more likely to attend schools during 'lockdown' than the national average (11%).
  - a. Teachers and other school staff are not included in the [9 priority groups](#) already identified by Government. The Directorate Leadership Team want to ensure that as many of our frontline workers receive their vaccination as soon as possible and are doing everything we can to achieve this. Cabinet is asked to support these efforts wherever possible.
6. School attendance for Surrey's looked after children has been excellent with overall attendance of over 90% for the first half-term of the academic year. 42% of our children in care (248 children) have a 100% attendance record for the entire half-term. This achievement combines the efforts of children and young people who are dedicated to their education, carers, schools and their Designated Teachers, Social Workers and the Surrey Virtual School, who are all working in partnership to promote the importance of

education in the lives of children who are looked after by Surrey County Council. We spoke to a selection of carers about some of the factors they felt were contributing to their children's fantastic school attendance;

- Carers who are encouraging of school and support children to complete their homework;
- Carers who have strong ongoing relationships with schools, including attending all school events;
- Young people's views on their school given a high value;
- An ethos of school attendance being non-negotiable;
- Information sharing between carers and schools on a regular basis;
- Support for children to get to school so they have a positive start to their day;
- Focussing on what children and young people enjoy about their school experience.

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7. Our staff have proved to be incredibly resilient and worked very hard to ensure children are kept safe and supported throughout the pandemic and we continue to ask managers to risk assess any team members returning to offices and are regularly reviewing these to ensure that new concerns and questions are picked up. There are currently just over 20 staff across children's services that are absent due to Covid-19.
  8. It is the systemic effects of Covid-19 that will have a long-term impact on the most vulnerable children, young people and families. We know there's been an impact on employment and debt and this in-turn increases child poverty and the associated risks for families that are struggling. The recent motion to Full Council on 8 December ([Item 8 \(i\)](#)) highlighted that the Council '*recognises that child poverty, including food, fuel, digital, housing and transport poverty which impact the whole family, is a systemic problem, not a temporary one which can be solved with short-term measures*'. The Council further recognised that '*system-wide initiatives delivered through early years settings, schools, health settings, family centres and elsewhere make a huge difference not just to child wellbeing but also to the quality of learning and other outcomes*'.

### **Increases in Demand & Pressure on Frontline Services**

9. Paragraphs 10-14 outline the impact of Covid-19 on the demand for – and delivery of – frontline children's services.
10. The increase in contacts to the Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) during lockdown and throughout the pandemic has led to a similar increase in referrals to social care. This has impacted on the re-referral rate and the number of children subject to a repeat assessment, Section 47 and Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC). Whilst this has not impacted on timeliness for a child to progress through the system, where targets are being achieved, we continue to see increases in the number of children subject of a Child Protection plan for a subsequent time.
  - a. The increased numbers of contacts from our statutory partners to the C-SPA continued throughout much of the year, with 42% of contacts having an outcome of 'information and advice'. Despite this, average timeliness to progress to Early Help (three working days) or from the Multi-Agency Partnership (MAP) team to the Assessment Service (two working days) has remained consistent.

- b. We have also worked 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. The service co-hosted two webinars with the voluntary, faith and community sector to share challenges and support each other to reach out to more families during the pandemic. We have engaged the support of the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SSCP) to work with partners to take more responsibility for sourcing support at Level 2 instead of going through the C-SPA. SSCP has requested a report on the progress of this initiative in December 2020.
  - c. There are currently over 1300 open assessments in social care teams, the number of open assessments incrementally increased from April to October although we have seen a slight reduction in the last month. Assessment timeliness remains high with just under 95% completed within required timescales.
  - d. Recent months have seen an increase in strategy discussions and Section 47 Enquiries taking place which has led to a 15% increase in the number children subject to Initial Child Protection Conferences. The number of children subject of a Child Protection plan has increased to 802; a 28% increase compared to this time last year.
11. There has been an increase in children coming into care during lockdown, specifically teenagers on section 20 (voluntary) agreements. Comparisons with national, regional and statistical neighbours suggests Surrey is potentially an outlier in this area.
- a. Excluding 26 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), there have been 182 new entrants to the care system between July and December 2020. Almost two thirds of these children and young people that started with a voluntary, Section 20 agreement. There were 36 (32%) children aged between 10 and 15 years of age in this cohort and 29 (26%) young people aged 16 or 17 years of age when they entered care on a S20 agreement.
  - b. As at 30th November 2020, there were 1039 children looked after by Surrey CC, 84 of these are UASC. The rate per 10,000 is 39 children and young people. This remains significantly below statistical neighbours (48), the region (53) and national figures for 2018/19 (65).
12. The increase in demand is leading to increased caseloads, specifically in Assessment, Safeguarding and Care Leaver services. Combined with approximately 30 social work vacancies, a high turnover of staff and almost 25% agency rate, the increase in demand may start to impact on timeliness and quality if increased levels of referrals continue through the winter.
13. Average caseload numbers across all services appear to be manageable at 16 children per worker. However, there is significant variation in these numbers at service and quadrant level:
- a. There are many social workers in Assessment teams with caseloads between 25-30 children, some with 35 or more. However, it is usual for Assessment

teams to have higher caseloads than teams providing longer-term support. There are specific workers and teams whose caseloads have increased, and we are supporting these teams; it is encouraging that performance across the Assessment teams remains high despite the challenges with workload.

- b. There are a few examples where Child Protection (CP) and Looked After Children (LAC) Social Workers have more than 15 children and young people allocated to them, though the data indicates this is an exception to the rule.
- c. Care Leaver caseloads average 18 young people, some Personal Advisors have 20+, the highest recorded number of allocations is 24.

14. We have appointed 40 newly qualified Social Workers recently however these practitioners do not have a full caseload until the latter part of their first year in social work employment. Some additional funding specifically to mitigate the impact due to Covid-19 has been used to add capacity to the teams in the medium-term.

### **Children's Improvement Update**

15. As previously reported to Cabinet, the service has embarked upon a comprehensive transformation programme with a major restructure of children's services completing last year to support the shift to the Effective Family Resilience model based on early support and prevention. The significant internal and external scrutiny of the improvement programme shows the huge amount of progress made to improve services. The overall aims of the Family Resilience Programme remain the same; to ensure that all children in the county receive the right help at the right time to enable them and their families to develop resilience to face future life challenges independently.

16. The key goals that drive the programme are the need to change the culture and practice in pursuit of consistently better outcomes for children, young people and their families. We aim to:

- a. Be smarter in terms of how we utilise the full partnership network – to provide more robust and resourced services at an earlier stage in the child's journey. We will use our leadership position to coordinate, promote cooperation and direct work to protect and safeguard children in this area.
- b. Commission an effective Universal Services and Early Help offer in Surrey to promote and improve the wellbeing and welfare of children in our area through increased coordination, recording and ownership of early intervention activity with partner agencies.
- c. Reduce the overall cost of services for children in Surrey through reallocation of resources to focus on earlier intervention and reduced demand (and spend) on higher cost, higher need services.
- d. Have smarter allocation of resources within the county, stepping down children to lower levels of need with smarter case management and follow-up/follow-through of care planning.



- e. Realign the workforce to enable the effective operation of the new Surrey Family Resilience and Safeguarding operating model.
- f. Achieve an overall Ofsted rating of Good or Outstanding for Surrey's children's services within 5 years from the last inspection.

## Inspections & External Scrutiny

17. **Ofsted Inspections:** Following the suspension of routine inspections in March 2020 due to COVID-19, Ofsted have now outlined their interim plans for a phased return to routine inspections. These interim arrangements will run initially from late September until March 2021 and Surrey's children's services look forward to hosting Ofsted for a Focussed Visit early in 2021 and will welcome feedback on how the local authority has supported children, young people and families throughout the pandemic. The national inspection activity is expected to resume from April 2021 and we are anticipating a full re-inspection of Surrey's children's services later in 2021.
18. **A Partner in Practice:** We are fortunate that, with agreement from the Department for Education (DfE), Essex County Council has been appointed as a Partner in Practice (PiP) for Surrey's children's services. Essex CC is rated as 'Outstanding' for Children's Services and specialises in working alongside other authorities to improve social work practice, and outcomes for children and their families. In September they carried out a full stocktake of our services and their initial feedback shows how far we've come since 2018 and their feedback has reinforced our improvement plans and the priorities set out in the 'Getting to Good' plan. We are excited to be working with Essex CC and welcome the support on our journey to delivering Good and Outstanding services for our residents.

## Focussing on our Workforce

19. Our workers within children's services are our most important and valuable strength and the ability to recruit and retain an excellent workforce also remains the greatest risk to our improvement plan; the impact of Covid-19 combined with 30 social work vacancies, a high turnover of staff and 25% agency rate reinforces the need to focus our efforts on our staff.
20. We have a comprehensive plan to develop our workforce strategy and improve our employee value proposition. This is a transformation project and is headed by a talented HR consultant and the implementation of the plan is overseen by the Director for Safeguarding and Family Resilience. This strategy will enable us to retain, develop and attract the best workers to Surrey and to cultivate a positive culture that is positive, supportive and meets the needs of our practitioners and managers. The workforce strategy group are focussing on six themes:
  - a. What you tell us about your work life - Research – Surveys Results and Analysis, Innovation, benchmarking, Benefits
  - b. What we can do to attract the best staff - Recruitment– Sourcing, Media, Attraction, EVP, Promotion, Assessment, Future Workforce
  - c. What makes you want to stay with us - Employee Experience –Engagement, Culture, Value, Behaviours, Retention, Pay, Reward & Recognition, Wellbeing

- d. How you develop your career with us: Learning & Development– Technical/Interpersonal/Management, Career Pathway, Competence
- e. How we succeed as a stable, secure workforce - Grow our own - Future proofing, Succession & Talent management, accelerated leadership, workforce planning and future skills planning
- f. How we review and continuously improve - Success Factor- Sustainable Development, Benefits Realisation, Leading Edge, Improvements

21. To further support our retention of experienced practitioners, the Council's People, Performance and Development Committee (PPDC) recently agreed a new financial package to attract and retain qualified social workers to join our service and this includes a £2000 retention payment to eligible social workers who have been in the service for 2 years or more.

### Improvement Updates Since June 2020

22. 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 the previous year along with one or two additional projects starting in early 2021:

23. **Getting to Good:** While the Covid-19 pandemic has put a strain on resources across children's services and we are seeing an increase in demand in most parts of the 'system', the focus on improving practice has not stopped. The next iteration of the improvement plan - the 'Getting to Good' plan - has been developed over the summer with input from all services through a collaborative approach and with strong buy-in from across the management and senior leadership team. The plan incorporates the learning from previous inspections, peer reviews, feedback from children and families and the significant amount of quality assurance work. The plan goes beyond the inspection findings from 2018; Effective Family Resilience is an entirely new practice model and therefore a more ambitious and innovative improvement plan is required to 'Get us to Good' and as previously reported, we are driven by improving outcomes for children and families and not simply on solving the issues highlighted by Ofsted, the DfE and the Commissioner.

24. **L-SPA & C-SPA Integration:** We are merging 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. The C-SPA was set up in Spring 2019 and has been working successfully since and we've built on this and the lessons learnt to help launch the integrated L-SPA in summer 2020 alongside a relocation of these services to a larger workspace in Woking. The impact of Covid-19 both on the ability for teams to work together on a day-to-day basis and the significant increases in contacts and referrals has put additional challenges on the C-SPA and L-SPA. We are working closely with our partners including schools, police and health as tackling these difficulties and increased workload using a complete partnership approach is the best way to ensure the needs of our most vulnerable residents are met.

25. **Emergency Duty Team (EDT):** We boosted capacity in EDT to manage the increased pressures of lockdown. This included youth workers, family group



conference coordinators, the Gateway team (placements), additional social workers and a mental health triage nurse. We were able to prevent family breakdown at evenings and weekends by immediately sending the team to work directly with families and then directing the right support to them from day teams. We have evaluated the impact of this model of delivery, researched other counties' EDT models and have agreed a new service model that enables us to continue the extended level of out-of-hours support as our business as usual model.

26. **Family Safeguarding Model:** In Surrey, the Family Safeguarding Model brings together under one roof all the professionals needed to help children and this ground-breaking approach has proved highly successful in other authorities around the country. The specialist workers for domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health expertise have now joined the teams, we're shifting to more multi-disciplinary case discussions and have new tools to support our direct work with children and their families. Motivational Interviewing techniques are key to this practice model and the training offer has continued over the last few months with a new rollout being planned for SCC staff and our partners in the new year. This new practice model has proven to be highly effective throughout the pandemic as keeping families together is an important focus of the model and our Family Safeguarding teams work openly and honestly with families about their difficulties and how we can support them to change.
27. **Mockingbird:** Following implementation of the new Mockingbird Family Model for fostering in October 2019, in the midst of Covid-19 restrictions, the third Mockingbird Hub was launched in August and feedback from those foster carers involved indicates that it provides a truly supportive network to the benefit of both children in care and their carers. Providing comfortable and safe homes for our children is a priority of all parents, no less of SCC as corporate parents, and various projects have continued apace linked to this aspect of our Strategy. Providing more, and more stable, homes with foster families is what our Mockingbird Family Model is all about. Recruitment of new fostering families has been challenging this year however we have quickly shifted to virtual fostering panels and making better use of technology to stay in contact with our carers and provide the much-needed support during such a difficult time.
28. **Helping Families Early Strategy:** A critical recommendation from Ofsted was that partners should do more to support families through early help. The launch of our Helping Families Early Strategy was delayed by the pandemic but we went live 3rd November through a Webinar which was attended by in excess of 170 people. The strategy is supported by Family Resilience Networks in each of our quadrants. These Networks meet at least quarterly and SSCP will receive a quarterly report on the progress of the strategy. All 4 quadrants have now hosted their first Network which were well attended with representatives from across the sector.
29. **Universal Youth Work:** In June, our Universal Youth Work consultation concluded after running for over 6 months and as a result we have agreed that:
- We enable the community, voluntary and faith sector (CVFS) to use the youth centres for the benefit of young people at little or no cost. We act as an enabler and facilitator of open access universal youth work rather than providing the service directly. The SCC expertise that is valued by residents - and in particular young people - can then be remodelled to continue to support specific vulnerable groups.*

- a. Our priority is to make sure the centres are first and foremost benefiting young people in the community but there will also be opportunities in some centres for wider community use as the plans for each of the centres are progressed. It is a difficult time to be offering youth activities at the moment as children and young people over the age of 11 are required to wear face coverings, as are youth workers, and the groups are limited in size. While this is slowing things down in the signing of leases and our work with the Lead Providers, it will not dampen the enthusiasm of our voluntary sector partners in the medium term.
  - b. During the latest national lockdown some education, training and childcare is permitted in youth centre buildings and also supports one-to-one work where it's necessary. We continue to provide frontline services for young people wherever the guidance allows for it and some of the centres are being used for alternative education provision as has been the case since restrictions were first put in place in March.
30. **No Wrong Door:** With the support of the Members' Reference Group which is reporting at this meeting, our Corporate Parenting teams are developing a local 'No Wrong Door' service, a well-evaluated short term residential model that was first developed in North Yorkshire in 2015 and offers an integrated approach to supporting some of the most vulnerable teenagers who are either in care, or at risk of coming into care. The service will be up and running by April 2021 and will initially operate from two of our current children's homes before two purpose-built hubs are completed in 2022 under the capital development programme. Further detail is contained in the reports to Select Committee (from the Member Reference Group) for this meeting.
31. **Neglect:** Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) has identified neglect as an area requiring improvement, both in terms of recognition and response to children experiencing neglect across services. Neglect is the most common category of abuse for children subject to child protection plans in Surrey. Following a pilot programme last year, we are in the process of implementing the Graded Care Profile 2.0 (GCP2) assessment tool to be used by practitioners in Health, Children's Services, Education and the Voluntary Sector across Surrey by December 2021. The GCP2 is a widely used assessment and planning tool designed to help practitioners working with families to identify when a child is at risk of neglect. The tool is evidence based, drawing upon strengths-based models, theories relating to child development, attachment and relationship-based models and therefore fits well with Surrey's models of practice. The successful utilisation of GCP2 should:
- Reduce the number of referrals for targeted and specialist services as a result of neglect parenting;
  - Reduce the number of case reviews which cite poor identification, assessment and response to neglect as a factor;
  - Reduce the number of children on child protection plans due to neglect;
  - Improve outcomes for children, young people and families.
32. **IT & Digital Services:** With support from colleagues in IT & Digital we have continued throughout the summer to innovate and implement new and improved systems and IT solutions to support our residents.

- a. As a result of some focused work earlier this year, the council identified the need to make it easier for parents/carers to find helpful information, advice and support for themselves, their children or their family. The Surrey Family Help Hub (previously known as 'Surrey's Little Help Shop'), (the name was chosen by young people), has been set up in response to this need, to try and develop a digital solution that helps navigate the complexity and scale of information that parents are faced with when looking for help.
- b. In October we signed an agreement with Liquid Logic to procure their **EYES system** that can integrate fully with their Early Help and Social Care modules that are already in use across Children Services. This is an ambitious change programme which will enable a 'single view of the child' across multiple systems. Allowing professionals across the span of Children's Services to spend more time with children and their families, better understand the whole of their journey and ensure sustainable high-quality evidence-based interventions and support to meet children's needs, particularly our most vulnerable, and accurately record, analyse and project costs.
- c. To address the issues with the payment of service providers and to enable better financial management across children's services, a project is underway to implement a **fully integrated finance system** this year. Several providers have been reviewed and we are aiming for the new system to be fully operational later this year. The anticipated benefits include: placement cost containment; improved relationships with service providers; reduced administration time; improved approval processes and security.
- d. The [Surrey Virtual Wellbeing Hub](#) is a singular place where you can view and access a range of online sessions and activities to support your mental health and wellbeing during Covid-19 and beyond. Partnering with third sector providers including The Richmond Fellowship, Catalyst, the Mary Frances Trust, Age UK Surrey and Surrey Coalition of Disabled People, any Surrey resident can now easily access local support online and from the comfort of their own home.
- e. **Parenting Guides:** Children and Family Health Surrey in partnership with Surrey County Council have a range of [free online parenting guides](#) available to access from their website. These guides have been written by experts and offer families the opportunity to understand their child's emotional development to support relationships and parenting challenges as they grow. They contain advice relevant to expectant parents, parents and carers of children of all ages including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

### **Long Term Impact of Covid-19 on Future need for Children's Services**

33. Work has been ongoing to understand the likely impact of Covid-19 for the next 12-18 months for our frontline teams in Children's Services. This has involved data modelling work within a wider framework of recovery planning for the directorate. To compliment council-wide operational responses and the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) structures in response to the Covid-19 outbreak, a set of workstreams were

established in the summer within Children's Services to focus on returning service delivery to normality as far as possible.

34. In addition, we have undertaken data modelling to understand likely demand increases on our services and are holding multiple workshops with VCFS (Voluntary, Care & Faith Sector) partners to discuss how best we can meet the challenges over the next year.
35. As reported above in paragraphs 10-14, we have seen demand increase dramatically across almost all services with referrals increasing by over 30% since February, children subject to Child Protection Plans up 15% and over 100 children coming into the care system in the last 3 months alone. If this increased demand continues then it will inevitably impact our ability to keep to timescales and ensure we're able to support all of our children and families in the way they deserve. Risks around staffing levels – particularly with the heightened risk of illness and related absences over the winter months – are at the forefront of our contingency planning.
36. We will continue to take a proportionate and risk-based approach when making decisions on service delivery and this will always put children and families first.

#### **CONSULTATION:**

37. The Surrey Children's Improvement Plan was developed between officers from the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture directorate, representatives from Surrey Police, Surrey School Phase Councils, health services including the CCGs and providers and colleagues from the third sector. Ofsted inspectors and representatives from the DfE were consulted on the content of the improvement plan in 2018 - and progress made since then – on a regular basis. Development of the next iteration of the improvement plan (the 'Getting to Good Plan') involved input from these key stakeholders through the Executive group of the Safeguarding Partnership.
38. Progress addressing the key areas of improvement across children's services continues to be scrutinised by the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee on a regular basis. Since last reporting to Cabinet on this subject, updates have been given to the Select Committee by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families and CFLLC Directors on 28 July and 14 December 2020 to provide the opportunity for scrutiny of the priority areas of work, the budget position and the performance of services.
39. Overall scrutiny and oversight of the improvement work and the delivery of the Children's Improvement Plan was transitioned to the Safeguarding Partnership from the Ofsted Priority Action Board (OPAB) from January 2020 onwards. This is following agreement from OPAB board members, the Independent Chair, the Safeguarding Partnership Executive, the Children's Commissioner (and now advisor) and the DfE representative. These arrangements will continue in 2021 with regular engagement and reporting to the Safeguarding Partnership Executive.
40. As part of the routine quality assurance and audit programme, a sample of children and families whose cases are being audited are routinely contacted to get feedback on their experience interacting with children's services. We seek feedback on what

they found worked well and any suggestions for how we could do things differently in future. This usually includes any involved partner agencies as well.

**RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:**

<p><b>Failure to recruit and/or retain staff in key posts delivering and managing services for children and families leads to children being left in harmful situations, poor outcomes, costly services and damaged reputation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Workforce Strategy group – established in summer 2020 – has developed a comprehensive plan to develop our workforce strategy and improve our employee value proposition. This strategy will enable us to retain, develop and attract the best workers to Surrey and to cultivate a positive culture that is positive, supportive and meets the needs of our practitioners and managers,</li> <li>• People, Performance and Development Committee (PPDC) recently agreed a new financial package to attract and retain qualified social workers to join our service and this includes a £2000 retention payment to eligible social workers who have been in the service from 2 years or more.</li> <li>• Regular engagement activity with the workforce is now in place following the first ‘Workforce Matters’ webinar in November 2020. These will provide opportunities for us to share ideas, hear how everyone is and take action where things need resolving.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The impact of Covid-19 on frontline practice caused by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Staff wellbeing deteriorating and leading to reduced productivity and increased absence.</b></li> <li>• <b>Inability to provide the required PPE for frontline staff or to make SCC workplaces ‘Covid-Safe’ reducing the ability to deliver frontline services.</b></li> <li>• <b>External commissioned providers, voluntary, faith and care sector providers of services for children, young people and families fail due to</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We're maintaining a good stock of PPE and have been for the last approx 8 months. During the first lockdown we established a 'system' for ordering, storing, tracking and distributing PPE to our frontline staff so that direct work with children and families wouldn't be impacted. This is coordinated by our Business Support Teams with PPE held at various locations for social workers and other frontline staff to be able to collect it</li> <li>• In terms of protecting our staff, we continue to ask managers to risk assess any team members returning to offices and are regularly</li> </ul>

<p><b>the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Delays in processes such as court procedures or other partnership working creates drift &amp; delay for children and families and negatively impacts on their outcomes.</b></li> <li>• <b>Reduced visiting (face-to-face), direct work with children and families and other frontline social work, negatively impacts on outcomes and leads to further negative consequences.</b></li> <li>• <b>Delayed referrals and ‘hidden’ household concerns such as neglect, domestic abuse and CSE lead to spikes in demand for services at a time when capacity will be stretched.</b></li> </ul>	<p>reviewing these to ensure that new concerns and questions are picked up.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While the Covid-19 pandemic has put a strain on resources across children's services and we are seeing an increase in demand in most parts of the 'system', the focus on improving practice has not stopped.</li> <li>• All teams within Commissioning Service have worked hard maintaining contact, visits and meetings (virtually) and support with providers to ensure continuation and quality of service. Teams have responded to the different challenges set by new ways of working and the different pressures and requirements put on them as part of the Covid lockdown and return to business-as-usual.</li> <li>• There have been ongoing discussion with Partners including the court service to ensure delays are minimised wherever possible.</li> <li>• The Mental Health and wellbeing needs of children and young people (CYP) have been of high profile throughout 2020. A weekly health/CYP recovery cell has continued to bring health partners together to discuss risks and mitigations throughout the C-19 period. This cell has oversight of recovery plans in-line with national direction and priorities for CYP MH, children’s community health and acute hospital provision (maternity/paediatrics).</li> <li>• During lockdown the Family Resilience providers largely delivered their services through virtual means which meant that families continued to receive support. Over the summer months they have moved towards delivering face to face activity alongside virtual support. Whilst working virtually has been extremely helpful in</li> </ul>
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	<p>maintaining contact with families, at present it is unclear as to how effective this has been in enabling families to become more resilient, especially with regards to building support networks and reducing isolation.</p>
<p><b>The quantity of change happening across the children's services operation leads to reduced performance across the service.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Officers understand that this is a challenging programme of transformation. We have high expectations that our staff will be able to provide the high quality service children in Surrey deserve. Additional resources have been deployed across the services during this period of rapid transformation and improvement.</li> <li>• Several of the Ofsted Monitoring Visit reports over the last <b>18-24</b> months have commented on the improving learning and quality assurance culture which enables managers to have a detailed and accurate view of front line practice and related performance. The high level of both internal and external scrutiny on the services enables managers to take corrective action if performance drops within a particular service.</li> <li>• Each of the Quadrant Assistant Directors has monthly performance meetings with all of their managers to maintain <b>practice standards, to challenge and improve where issues are identified and to embed good practice</b>. We have built in additional capacity <b>across all quadrants</b> – extended <b>until March 2022</b> - to lend resilience as new ways of working with families and with partners continue to embed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Wider stakeholder groups involved in the provision of children's services and related support for vulnerable children and their families may not be fully engaged or committed to working collaboratively to ensure the successful delivery of the Surrey</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership representation is vital and this view is supported by the recommendations following Ofsted's 2018 inspection of children's services. A cross-partnership 'Improvement Plan Delivery Group' was established in 2018 and this group reported regularly to the</li> </ul>

<p><b>Children’s Improvement Programme and wider Transformation plans.</b></p>	<p>Ofsted Priority Action Board on progress. Continued oversight and scrutiny of the improvement work transitioned to the Safeguarding Partnership from January 2020 and this group includes key stakeholders across the partnership. Robust terms of reference have been agreed and all partners are held to account by the Independent Chair.</p>
<p><b>Failure to transform the provision of children’s services and related support for vulnerable children and their families through collaborative engagement and commitment of the wider stakeholder groups leads to children being left in harmful situations and damaged reputation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surrey Children’s Safeguarding Partnership continuing to ensure improvements are delivered and embedded across all agencies.</li> <li>• Close working with Department for Education and Ofsted to inform Children’s improvement strategy.</li> <li>• New Family Safeguarding model developed to strengthen relationships with vulnerable children and families.</li> <li>• Surrey Children’s Services Academy co-ordinating recruitment, learning and development across agencies.</li> <li>• Monitoring of change through quality assurance and performance management across Children’s services to ensure performance and quality of service delivery is maintained.</li> <li>• Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership relaunched and becoming embedded in assuring the system and driving learning</li> </ul>

**FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

41. All improvement work is being delivered using existing resources, revenue budgets, grant funding and transformation funding where required. The transformational changes set out in this report will contribute to the efficiencies included in the medium-term financial plan.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTARY**

42. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council’s financial position, the medium term financial outlook is uncertain. The public health crisis has resulted in increased costs which may not be fully funded. With uncertainty about the ongoing impact of this and no clarity on the extent to which both central and local funding sources might be affected from next year onward, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term. As such,

the Section 151 Officer supports the progress of the Children's Improvement Plan, which will be delivered within existing revenue budgets and factored into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

#### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS – MONITORING OFFICER**

43. This update is provided for information and does not require any decision. In his original report to the Secretary of State the Commissioner highlighted the importance of the role of Members in the delivery of the improvement plan. Members will need to consider the progress of the continuing Improvement Plan as set out in this report.

#### **EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY**

44. There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report but any actions taken need to be consistent with the council's policies and procedures.

#### **CORPORATE PARENTING/LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IMPLICATIONS**

45. The re-inspection of children's services by Ofsted in February/March 2018 rated the 'children looked after and achieving permanence' service as Requires Improvement. 5 (of the 18) recommendations from the inspectors specifically relate to services for looked after children; several actions in the Children's Improvement Plan have addressed these issues. In addition, the Corporate Parenting Board, chaired by the Lead Member for Children, Young People & Families, continue to oversee the relevant improvement work for these services.

#### **SAFEGUARDING RESPONSIBILITIES FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND ADULTS IMPLICATIONS**

46. The Children's Improvement Plan outlines the work required to address all recommendations from Ofsted following the re-inspection of children's services. Up to 10 of the recommendations describe work required to address failings in our practice to safeguard vulnerable children. The 'Getting to Good Plan' (i.e. the next iteration of the improvement plan) outlines the priority improvement activity to be undertaken between October 2020 and September 2021.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

47. Following the suspension of routine Ofsted inspections in March 2020 due to COVID-19, the HMCI has now outlined the interim plans for a phased return to routine inspections. These interim arrangements will run initially from late September 2020 until March 2021. Surrey's children's services look forward to hosting Ofsted for a Focussed Visit during this period and will welcome feedback on how the local authority has supported children, young people and families throughout the pandemic. It should be noted that these 'Focussed Visits' will not result in a graded judgement.
48. The routine national inspection activity is expected to resume from April 2021; this was re-confirmed following the November/December 'lockdown' with further detail available on the [GOV.UK website](https://www.gov.uk). We are anticipating a full re-inspection of Surrey's children's services later in 2021.
49. Oversight and scrutiny of the improvements to children's services will continue to take place at the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Partnership (Executive group), the Surrey Corporate Parenting Board and the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning &

Culture Select Committee. Detailed action plans are in place for the period October 2020 to September 2021. All Assistant Directors across children's services are responsible for delivery of their respective action plans and additional resources have been recruited to support them and their services with this focussed improvement activity over the next 12 months.

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**Consulted:**

- Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families
- Simon Hart, Independent Chair of the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Partnership
- Surrey Children's Safeguarding Partnership – Executive Group

**Annexes:**

- None

**Sources/background papers:**

- Guidance information published on GOV.UK - [Guidance for children's social care providers about Ofsted's phased return to inspection](#).
  - 'Update on Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner Inspections' at the 21 January 2020 ([Item 7](#)) meeting of the Select Committee.
  - 'Children's Improvement Update' at the 23 June 2020 meeting of Cabinet ([Item 10](#)).
  - Motion to Full Council on 8 December ([Item 8 \(i\)](#))
  - GOV.UK [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for children's social care services](#)
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