

**EASTERN REGION ADCS
CHILDREN'S SERVICES COVID-19 DRAFT RESET PLAN v4
July 2020**

Local Authority:	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
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This Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Reset Plan is a living recovery planning document that will be reviewed and adapted in line with government guidance and as the impacts of the pandemic on children, young people, families and our communities become clearer over the coming months.

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1. INTRODUCTION

All communities and every aspect of children's services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Our Reset plan is a living document that outlines a summary of the key issues and themes emerging from feedback and learning from the way we have adapted our services. It links with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough council's education recovery plan, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough vulnerable people's recovery subgroup work plan and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough council's corporate recovery plans.

Senior leaders across both councils responded swiftly to the government lockdown, adapting our practice and developing guidance, with strong collaboration from our partners to try to minimise impact on service delivery. We have supported workers to continue to engage and safeguard children and their families in the unprecedented circumstances.

As part of our recovery planning for both short-term and longer-term service delivery, we will continue to gather feedback from staff, partners, children, young people and their families and review key themes to maintain service delivery in the recovery period. This will help ensure a smooth transition from service delivery during the Covid-19 lockdown to the subsequent easing of lockdown measures and any further waves and subsequent lockdown arrangements.

Arrangements in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire are unique in that we are two local authorities that are working increasingly closely together in order to share services, knowledge and capacity where this makes sense in terms of improving services and hence outcomes for children and young people, building resilience and/or delivering increased efficiency.

We have a number of shared senior roles including all roles at Assistant Director and above, and while the majority of our services continue to be delivered on an authority specific basis, all services have benefited through the pandemic from the increased resilience that this approach has brought.

Partners also welcome this delivery model since, for example, our shared Integrated Front Door, including the MASH and Early Help Hub, means that they experience a consistent approach across the two authorities.

The two authorities are very different in terms of demography, however. In general, while there are areas of deprivation in the county, Cambridgeshire is generally significantly less deprived than Peterborough, while the latter is more ethnically diverse. Cambridgeshire has different challenges in that it is geographically large, meaning that some communities are isolated, with poor transport links, and this includes some areas of the county that are also economically deprived.

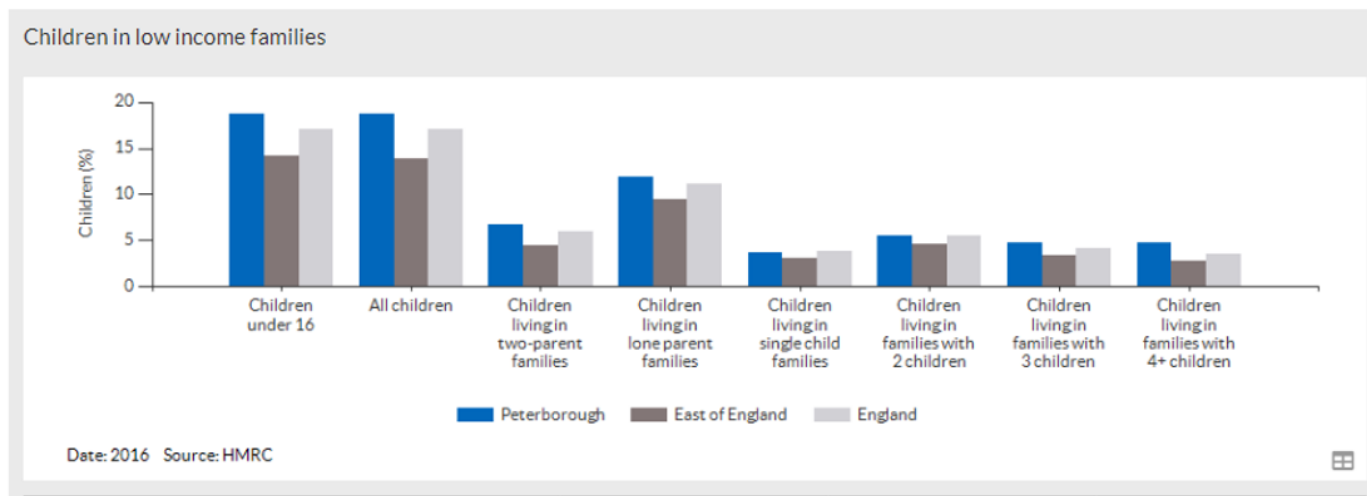
These differences in the demography and rurality of the two authorities means that the populations in each will experience different impacts from Covid-19. We know, for example, that mortality rates from the virus are higher among black and minority ethnic populations, and that the virus is more likely to spread among overcrowded communities, factors that could have a significant impact in the event of any renewed surge in infection rates.

Rural disadvantage and isolation, meanwhile, is likely to further compound any economic fallout following the lockdown, while also disproportionately impacting on younger people and those in less secure employment.

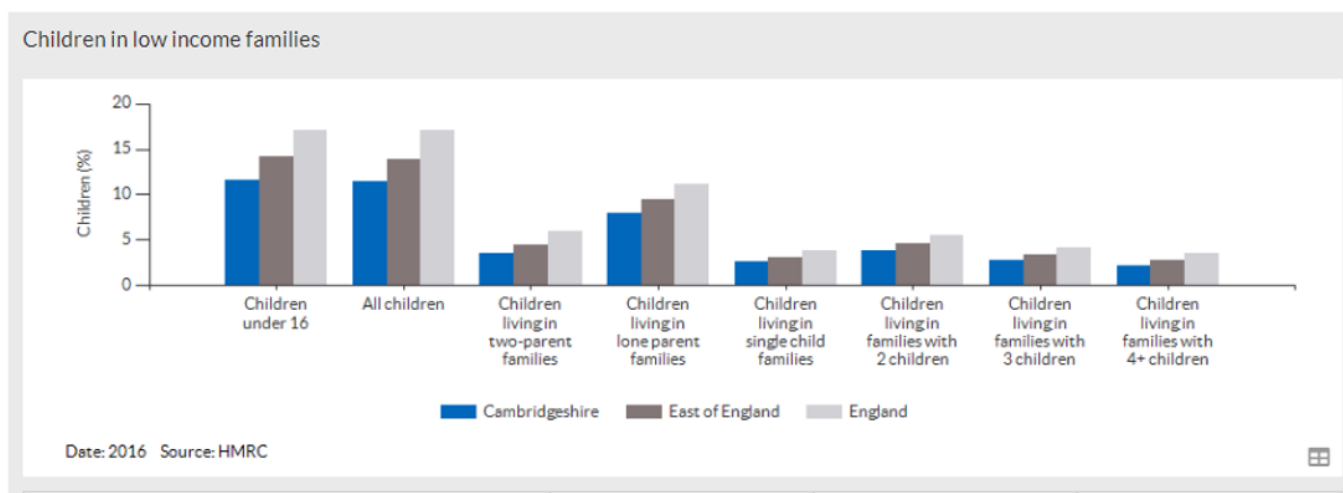
Cambridgeshire has a much larger population than Peterborough, with 104,000 children and young people aged 0-19 resident, compared with 58,000 in Peterborough.

The following two charts summarise the differences between the two authorities in terms of the proportion of children living in low income families:

Peterborough:



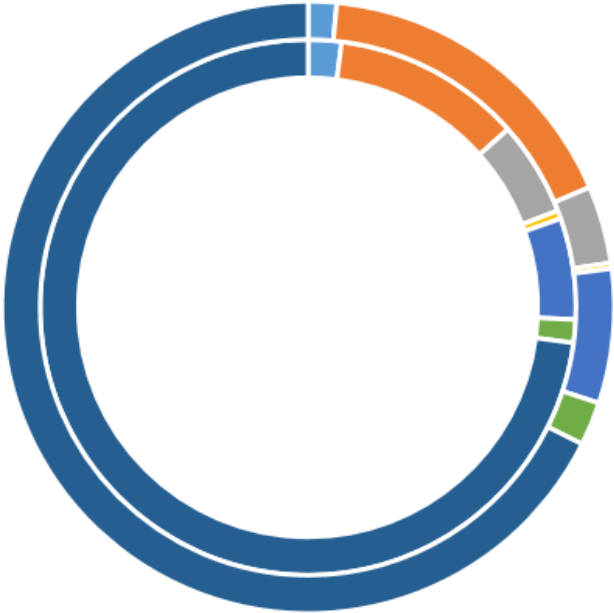
Cambridgeshire:



Almost 19% of all children in Peterborough are living in low income families, compared with 11% in Cambridgeshire; a higher proportion of children live in lone parent families in Peterborough than in Cambridgeshire, and there are also more children living in larger households in Peterborough than Cambridgeshire.

The following charts illustrate the proportions of children from different ethnic backgrounds according to the January 2020 school census:

Ethnicity, School Census Jan 2020, Peterborough (outer ring) compared to England

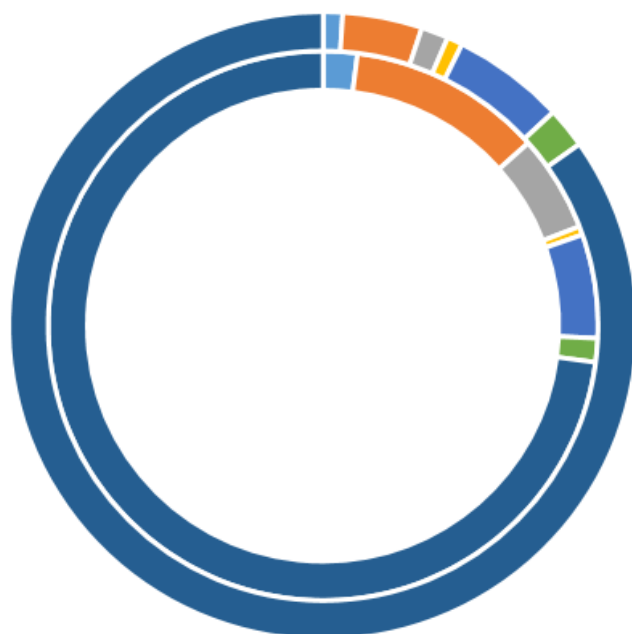


- Any other ethnic group ■ Asian
- Black ■ Chinese
- Mixed ■ Unclassified
- White

There is a relatively larger Asian population in Peterborough than in England as a whole, with the majority of children in this group being of Pakistani heritage.

The white population overall makes up 67% of the overall population. White British children account for 48% of the total population, with a further 19% being from 'white other' communities.

Ethnicity, School Census Jan 2020, Cambridgeshire (outer ring) compared to England



- Any other ethnic group
- Black
- Mixed
- White
- Asian
- Chinese
- Unclassified

The population of children in Cambridgeshire is significantly less diverse than that of Peterborough, and less diverse than the overall national population.

10% of the child population in the County is from 'white other' backgrounds, slightly higher than the England average of 7%.

Notwithstanding the areas of Cambridgeshire characterised by relative deprivation – mainly in the fenland area, along with some pockets elsewhere, it is clear from the above data that all things being equal, the adverse impact of Covid 19 is likely to be greater in Peterborough than in Cambridgeshire, owing to the greater impact of the virus on disadvantaged communities and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

That is not to say that the challenges facing Cambridgeshire are not going to be significant, but given the additional financial challenges facing Peterborough City Council, as well as those facing key partners including our health partners in particular, the challenges in responding to the pandemic and any future outbreaks are potentially greater in Peterborough.

2. PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING RECOVERY

The impact of the pandemic is likely to be multifaceted, including both short term and much longer term impacts on outcomes for children and young people. Addressing these impacts must shape the response by the services that support our most vulnerable children, young people and families in particular.

Although there have been some positive benefits from the changes of practice that the pandemic has forced into place, there is no getting away from the very significant disruption that the lockdown has brought to children's education. The extent of the economic downturn will only be known as the furlough scheme begins to wind down between August and October 2020, but it is also likely to have a significant impact on families, and our most vulnerable families and communities are likely to be worst affected .

Our goal is to reflect on the challenges and opportunities the current crisis has presented and review everything we have learned. We will use the time to consider how we harness learning to further improve and reset our practice and further develop services for children in our local communities so, children and young people:

- live healthy lives;
- are safe from harm;
- are confident and resilient with an aptitude and enthusiasm for learning, and;
- prioritise the effective use of resources to ensure that as far as possible, we have the ability to respond to any short and longer term increases in demand.

In achieving these priorities, we will also ensure that we:

- Keep our staff and communities as safe as possible in the event of any resurgence of the pandemic;
- Improve the work-life balance of our staff, and;
- Reduce our carbon footprint and the impact of our activities on our environment.

Our immediate concerns include:

- Re-starting face to face work where the lack of this has had greatest adverse impact;
- Working to ensure that our staff can return to offices safely and in accordance with relevant guidance;
- Understanding how to achieve the maximum benefits from retaining a hybrid model where some services continue to be operated remotely;
- Interrogating key performance information to forecast and monitor demand for services, seeking additional resources or the redeployment of existing resources to meet changing patterns of need;
- Ensuring that we have the right technology and models of staff support to enable a continuation of increased home working.

Throughout this period, we will continue to seek the views of children, young people, families, key stakeholders and our staff in helping us to plan the best response within the resources available.

3. IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON STAFF, SERVICES AND FAMILIES -

The long term impact of the pandemic on children, young people and families is likely to be significant. All the available evidence indicates that the impact is likely to be greatest for families who were already struggling financially or with stresses including those related to parenting, domestic abuse, isolation and mental and emotional difficulties. Families from black and minority ethnic communities are also likely to experience greater longer term impacts, both because these communities are more likely to experience economic deprivation, and because mortality rates have been higher, meaning that more families from these communities are likely to experience grief and loss within their extended families.

During the lockdown phase of the pandemic, services have worked hard to ensure that there is continuing on-going support for vulnerable families, and that those children at greatest risk have been safeguarded. Achieving these priorities meant considering how to respond to some requests for services and some changes have been made to managing contacts at the front door.

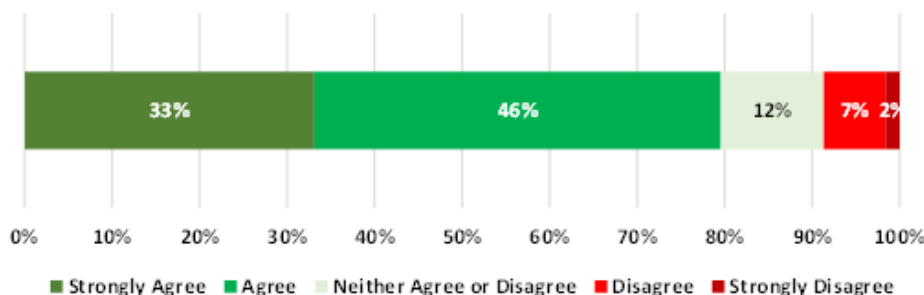
The dedication of our staff, managers, foster carers and key partner agencies to continuing to make sure that the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families throughout continues to be outstanding.

In the early stages of the lockdown, managers identified staff who needed to shield and those with caring responsibilities so that work could be reallocated where necessary and prioritised. A small number of council offices remained open with reduced capacity, but the vast majority of staff were enabled to work from home in line with government guidance.

Senior leaders made an early decision to robustly risk assess all cases to understand and prioritise where face to face contact with families was necessary while adhering to social distancing guidelines. Developing guidance and practice standards so that we could maintain a physical presence for a small number of families where necessary.

For example, with some face to face visits to children, direct interventions with families, assessments with families, face to face child protection conferences with social distancing measures adhered to. Continuous risk assessments, management oversight and staff willingness has allowed services to continue to operate face to face where required throughout this time. The majority of staff believe that we have continued to offer a good service through the lockdown, as evidenced from a staff survey completed at the end of June:

We have been able to maintain our delivery of services to customers during this period



The biggest change for children and their families has been the partial closure of education settings. In common with other local authorities throughout England, we have seen only a small percentage of children attend schools in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. We also know that children who have attended school in person, have had a different learning experience than prior to Covid-19.

While attendance of vulnerable children and young people in the two authorities has been better than in many areas in the country, it was still very low overall. The re-opening of schools to some year groups in June meant we saw an increase to approximately 13% and 15% of children attending school in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough just prior to the end of the summer term.

The lack of access to an educational provision during lockdown means some children have not had the usual level of oversight from a range of professionals. We are anticipating there will be some attainment gaps developing because of the range of access to education activities some children will have received at home. Our education recovery plan is therefore focused on reintegrating children back into school and monitoring key vulnerable groups who are most likely to be at risk of poor education outcomes as a result of the partial school closures.

Alongside the lack of professional oversight, we know from national data that more children have experienced domestic abuse, neglect and financial hardship during lockdown.

Locally, claims for Universal Credit have increased rapidly across both authorities, but the most significant impact has been in areas that were already disadvantaged as indicated by IDACI. There has, for example, been a 350% increase in claims for Universal Credit in Peterborough since the beginning of the pandemic. The increase across the two authorities has averaged around 150%.

Joint work with our education colleagues and other partners has ensured that we target resources to our most vulnerable children and families, tracking children and offering additional support to families, with particular attention being paid towards those at risk of neglect, increased levels of domestic abuse and other harms

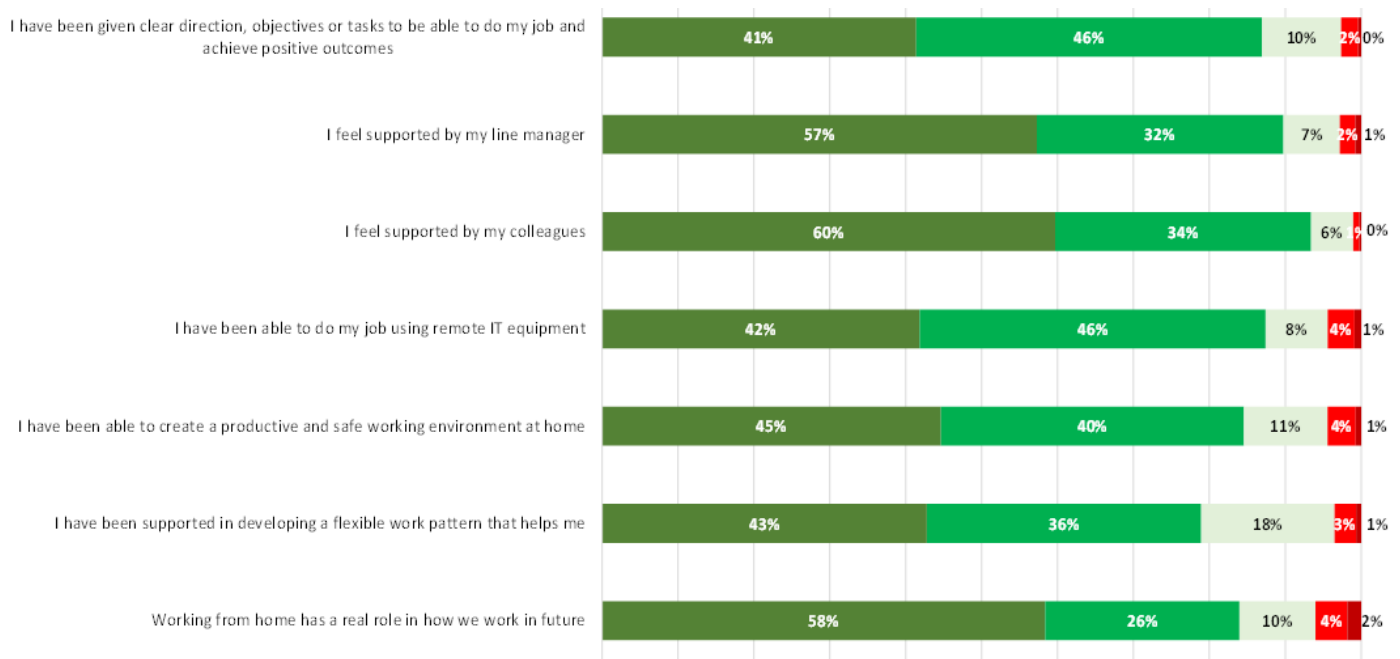
To continue to support families we were able to quickly establish virtual service offers where appropriate. Staff have embraced the changes and adapted well to the new arrangements. We have been able to utilise various technological solutions such as (Microsoft teams, Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom, etc) to undertake virtual visits to families, virtual looked after children reviews, supervised contact, triple PPP parenting programmes on line and a range of virtual participation events for children in care and care leavers.

Managers and senior leaders have closely monitored services and dip sampled cases where we have made changes to practice during this time. One of the areas for development identified as part of our reset planning, is to change some of our business reports to better understand performance details on what ratio of work has been undertaken as a virtual or face to face service.

Staff have also used technology to support other colleagues during this uncertain time. Informal virtual gatherings sharing innovation and 'good news' stories has been supportive alongside regular supervision, online team meetings and online training opportunities.

Senior managers have taken the opportunity to talk to staff and streamline work processes through the lockdown. Additional guidance has been developed and shared including practice tips on building relationships with children virtually and guidance on digital professionalism.

Staff have reported through supervisions; team meetings and the staff survey they have felt supported during this period and have reflected some of the current ways of working are helping them in their work life balances. The following is taken from the staff survey carried out in June 2020:



The overwhelming majority of comments about the changed working arrangements from staff have also been positive. Many pointed to the reduced carbon footprint, greater productivity and often, enhanced engagement with service users. Example comments from staff included:

‘A huge reduction in mileage costs. Meetings and visits have been able to take place virtually and some have been better for this- a lot of children have managed this well, some preferring virtual visits and engaging better.’	Social worker in corporate parenting
‘I feel getting used to and being creative with video platforms has been invaluable. We are also having to work very creatively to counteract no longer seeing clients face to face and although this has been a challenge has been an amazing way to look at how we work and be creative.’	Early Help worker

The changed model of working has also resulted in a significant reduction in sickness levels across the service – 50% less sickness in Peterborough between April and June 2020 compared with the same period in 2019, for example, with a similar reduction in Cambridgeshire [confirmed data to follow].

There was also an acknowledgement that for some families, there would always be a need for face to face working, with the majority view being that in the longer term, a hybrid model of working, with a significant proportion remaining virtual, but continued face to face work where needed, was likely to be the best approach.

We have encouraged staff to take annual leave where possible to avoid the risk of burnout and fatigue. Early help and social care staff, foster carers, and residential children’s home staff, have been operating under extraordinary circumstances for a sustained period to maintain services.

Feedback from families is that they have felt supported. Social workers have reported that some children’s engagement has increased, and relationships improved due to regular keeping in touch calls with children and families. Some families, however, are not able to receive the same services as they did prior to the pandemic and there have been some delays in progressing services to families.

Children in care and care leavers have given positive feedback on the use of technology to facilitate visits, contact with family and participation sessions. However, while children report changes made to their respective contact arrangements have been managed well, and some children have been really happy they have had more contact with some family members through virtual contact, most children are looking forward to resuming face to face contact.

A children and young people's survey was carried out during June, to understand the impact of Covid-19 on them and whether the support offered was felt to be sufficient. We had 98 responses from children, young people and care leavers and responses were overwhelmingly positive. The feedback has been analysed and is being shared at all levels within the organisation. The rich feedback we have received will inform future decision making and associated action/service plans. Some of the comments by children and young people included:



We have seen improved performance including visits in timescales for children in care and care leavers, alongside an increase in children's and young people's engagement although this started to decline as children's interest has dropped off and there are more alternative activities they can be involved in as lockdown eases.

Staff have monitored and managed risk to commissioned service delivery, requesting business continuity plans, monitoring situational reports and making provisions for PPE so that essential services have been delivered. We have seen collaborative working to ensure services and placements for both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough children, as well as children placed by other local authorities in our area have been monitored and supported. A very small number of placements have disrupted during the lockdown and we quickly identified alternative placements and have given additional support where necessary.

We have experienced an increase in families seeking support from our children's centres and Covid hubs including financial support such as emergency parcels (toys / clothes / equipment), foodbank vouchers, support with managing children's behaviours and concerns raised regarding feelings of isolation.

Our Carers service has specifically seen a marked increase in Covid specific queries such as home learning (specifically young carers), PPE and clarifying their status as a carer.

We have however seen a decrease in demand for some services during lockdown. One area has been a reduction in contacts and referrals at the front door. To ensure we had capacity, we made

changes to contact processes at the integrated front door via the Customer Service Centre. These included temporarily not accepting the following:

- Domestic Abuse referrals judged to be standard by police
- Requests for information on whether children are known or have been known to our services
- Chaperone checks
- New Education Health and Care Plan requests or associated paperwork,
- Background checks for example for Ofsted or CAFCASS
- IDVA notifications
- Court orders where there was no safeguarding risk or action to be taken.

To safeguard children, we continued to receive telephone referrals for significant and immediate risk to children with written referral following up phone call within 24 hours so that we could take immediate safeguarding action as required.

We continued to receive referrals for children who require an assessment of need, where there are concerns about parental capacity to meet their needs effectively and where there is a risk of harm with parental consent. We worked with partners to agree if there is no parental consent obtained and there are no identified safeguarding concerns the referral would not be worked and returned to referring professional for follow up.

The impact of these changes have been monitored closely and we have now resumed all contacts with the exception of the Domestic Abuse referrals judged to be standard by police. Forecasting within the Eastern region has predicted a rise in contacts as larger cohorts of children started to return schools, the extent to which this proves to the case will be known as we move through September and into October 2020.

We have also seen a decline in the use of short breaks and packages for disabled children. Some parents declined services as they wished to shield their children and some services were disrupted due to government guidelines. The Children with Disability delivery board will be looking at service delivery as part of the reset planning for this cohort of children to ensure support and services are in place.

4. *HOW SERVICES HAVE ADAPTED*

Following lockdown and the changes made by the government through the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 to ease some of the legal duties in the Children and Families Act 2014, we took the opportunity to review the way we work and the services that we offer. In the event, we have not had to use easements other than some timescales and the use of virtual visits, continuing to provide services to our most vulnerable children.

We worked with public health to ensure the covid-19 pages of our websites gave up to date information and updates of services available. We will continue to use our websites meetings to update our communities as the government relax and review guidance.

We have seen increased use of self-help support with families accessing information online and our social media traffic has been noted to have increased significantly during this period as has the use of virtual support. Virtual support has been deployed as a Covid-19 safe alternative to face to face contact as some families have been reluctant for agencies to conduct home visits when they have been offered due to infection anxieties.

Community hubs to support families and children staffed by volunteers and re-deployed staff from a range of disciplines were established very quickly. These have proved effective in supporting vulnerable families to access food parcels, delivering prescriptions, providing advice, guidance and information. A working group led by the Service Director for Communities has been established with the aim of taking this learning forward. The potential continuing contribution from such place and community focused models of delivery will inform our review of early help services as we move out of the pandemic.

Children's centres report positive feedback and strong engagement with the digital content we have produced and promoted through social media. This has altered our demographic and geographical reach. There has been an interactive element to our digital content, whereby information is driven by feedback/requests from families, which is working well.

The community hubs and partners were able to use the local offer and signpost families to resources that are available to support them. One of the key learning from the hubs has been that families have been able to self-refer and use information to find services. We will take this opportunity to review the local offer, our websites and early help documents to signpost families to access self-help services in the future.

As with the rest of both Councils' staffing arrangements, the vast majority of children's services staff moved to working from home as far as they were able to do so, and only a skeleton Duty service remained operating from offices. Senior leaders made the decision to continue delivering face to face visiting for our most vulnerable service users with continued access to buildings when essential.

Staff have given positive feedback on this decision and worked with their managers to implement social distancing measures and appropriate use of PPE to keep themselves and service users as safe as possible. This has proved very effective with low levels of infection being reported by either children or staff to date. We will continue to monitor the need and distribution of PPE including to commissioned providers in line with government recommendations.

There has been real appreciation from many staff about the ability to work from home, and to manage their time more productively. The improvements to the network and servers in the initial

lockdown stages to enable effective remote working were very impressive, and staff felt supported by the efforts of their managers to set up keeping in touch and other meetings. However, social work remains a very challenging job, and staff have also commented frequently on the absence of usual office supports and having to hear and manage very difficult information in their own homes at times. We will continue to monitor staff morale and home working arrangements.

The use of digital technology has been varied. We have seen a range of benefits such as creating efficiencies (shorter meetings, time and resource saving as staff have not had to undertake any unnecessary travelling between sites, or sourced venues and reductions in generating hard copies of documents unless essential), alongside positive engagement by service users. We have also successfully, continued with staff recruitment throughout the lockdown period. However, it is recognised that this medium is less accessible for certain populations, especially those living in deprivation, whereby data allocation, internet connection and space is limited.

Staff have been positive about the use of technology to support professional development opportunities. We have continued to roll out our family safeguarding service training and other courses across the service virtually. We will take the learning from the use of virtual courses and support of our practice model forward to develop our Workforce development joint strategy in the future.

To support staff, we developed Covid-19 information pages online and have used these alongside regular Covid-19 meetings to give and receive updates to and from staff teams and providers. We will continue to use these meetings as necessary to update staff and providers as the government relax current restrictions and statutory changes.

Challenges to staff working from home include access to working space and managing the competing demands of other household members, and factors such as these will need to be considered in designing models of work that allow for more home-based working. All staff spoken to have reflected that there is an opportunity to consider using technology differently to support them and facilitate partner attendance at larger meetings in the future, whilst recognising that there will need to be a return to at least some office-based working moving forward.

The introduction and use of a range of new digital technologies has helped us to offer services and engage with partners to allow panels, meetings and case discussions to continue for example through Microsoft teams, Skype, WhatsApp etc.. Technology has also allowed for some services to be offered online including, for example, parenting programmes such as Triple PPP. Information sharing across the system has increased due to more virtual communication between organisations.

The improved partnership working through stronger communication, information sharing and engagement has overwhelmingly been cited as a positive outcome from the pandemic. We have also seen a more joined up approach between specific organisations for example between Health Visiting and Midwifery; Midwifery and Children's Centres; Local Authority and Voluntary Sector.

One area that also utilised technology has been in our court work. This has been a significant success story in comparison to many other parts of the country. We have managed to hold all but one final hearing to the original court timetabling as planned. We have also offered virtual access to parents as needed, and all other hearings have worked well. Workers report a significant reduction in time commitment with virtual hearings, although it is not ideal when parents are needing to give evidence themselves.

Alongside this we moved to a largely virtual model of operation for supervised contact. The courts have been accepting of this position to date. We have continued to offer some direct contact during

complex proceedings or for very young babies. This has been extremely difficult for our families, and we are now resuming face to face contact where we can safely do so.

Virtual fortnightly meetings of the children in care council alongside weekly leaving care meetings has allowed participation workers to gain children in care and care leaver's views and report back to Corporate parenting leaders. Care leavers have told us that they have enjoyed keeping in touch with their personal advisors and the participation team virtually and are looking forward to the care leaver cuppa and chat virtual meeting once a week. We will use the feedback and learning from children and young people and work with them to continue to develop a broader virtual participation offer, alongside our face to face offer.

As stated previously we have continuously risk assessed all open children's cases working closely with education colleagues, reviewed by heads of service and prioritised on a vulnerable children's tracker. This enabled us to RAG rate all cases and determine which could move to virtual or reduced visiting patterns and which required face to face contact to continue. Plans for children were also reviewed as other agencies withdrew from direct contact, and we adapted interventions to try and address resultant gaps in Child Protection Plans, for example. The most significant impact was that of school closures, but the withdrawal of direct health visiting services, mental health services and other primary care services has been an ongoing concern.

A major piece of work was undertaken by the MASH in conjunction with Education Safeguarding leads to work with all schools in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire to identify and share details of children of most concern, and either provide them with a school place or ensure that they had very regular contact from their school. This has worked very well with a number of our families, but we are conscious that a significant percentage have failed to take advantage of this support, and that as time has gone on, the impact on our children is of increasing concern.

This has been most acute for children with complex needs at specialist provision, although schools have worked extremely well with us to try and address these issues. We will review these cases as a multi-disciplinary team to look at emerging needs for these children going forward, monitoring statutory school attendance, with particular attention to the potential impact of Covid-19 and encouraging children and young people to return to school.

We have worked with health colleagues to set up a series of weekly meetings where concerns are monitored at a senior level, and we appreciate that virtual delivery of services has been offered as an alternative in a number of areas. Acute risk has continued to be addressed and special arrangements were made for Child Protection medicals, but in other areas the lack of direct delivery has been of concern to both partners.

We are working with midwifery services now to host services in some of our Early Help venues and will also try and support catch up immunisation programmes. At present, Initial and Review Health Assessments are all conducted virtually, as are fostering and adoption medicals. CAMHS services are virtual in all but the most serious circumstances. We will closely monitor demand for health services and continue to meet with health colleagues and support their return to face to face working in these key areas.

Early Help support continues to function on a reduced level to offer support to children and families, while we have used technology to support continuation of multi-agency support by virtual panels.

We have also moved to virtual Child Protection Case Conferences and Children in Care Reviews in some cases. Feedback is that the latter virtual meetings have worked well in a number of instances and have saved social work and IRO time. Some young people have found participation easier as

well, but it has not always worked especially when placements are fragile or require additional support.

Virtual Child Protection Conferences and Public Law Outline meetings have been much more challenging, and there have been continuing issues with the virtual technology. We are concerned that parents are not able to make a meaningful contribution to these very important meetings. This is especially the case if interpreters are required or parents have additional needs, and we will move back to face to face meetings as soon as it is possible to do so.

In relation to placements, we have seen very little disruption. Despite a number of our foster carers being in more vulnerable groups, they have been absolutely committed to the children in their care, Independent fostering agencies have also been extremely positive in the main, and our Commissioning Team has worked extremely hard to continue to source residential and semi-independent placements when required. This has become increasingly challenging in the last few weeks, and again placements for children with complex needs are the most difficult and expensive to identify.

Due to the complex nature of children with disabilities we have seen a reduction in the take up short breaks. We will need to review need and provision to support families through the summer holidays and into the autumn term, especially as if numbers are limited in overnight short breaks.

Statutory youth offending work has continued including, court and custody procedures with some virtual visits. We will again review learning from this period.

The biggest changes in practice were made in relation to Children in Care and care leavers visiting, mainly to a virtual pattern of visiting and reviewing once the cases had been risk assessed. We will continue to risk assess cases and use the easement of face to face visits and timescales whilst the need for social distancing and covid-19 responses remain.

5. MANAGING & MONITORING COVID 19 CHANGE ACTIVITY

Throughout the pandemic we have continued to monitor changes to practice and key performance data to understand the quality of practice across the two authorities. We are making changes to our performance reports to understand and monitor our virtual offer better.

In terms of demand, the Front Door has seen some very dramatic changes. In February 2020, Peterborough received 1195 contacts, of which we converted 278 to referrals (a rate of 23.6%). The lock down commenced on 23.3.20. and we implemented a restricted referral process that prioritised safeguarding concerns over routine enquiries on 30.3.20. This was agreed with partners and the Safeguarding Board at the time.

Not only have actual numbers fallen, but the conversion rates are dramatically different as well. Some of this shows the impact of practice changes as a lower conversion rate was already evident in the February before the onset of the pandemic. Nevertheless, the tables below show the scale of the change, while indicating that the number of referrals has been climbing for both authorities as the lockdown progressed and is now easing:

CCC Children	Contacts 2019	Referrals 2019	%	Contacts 2020	Referrals 2020	%
March	2193	471	21%	2089	319	15%
April	2203	428	19%	1446	233	16%
May	2331	360	15%	1734	335	19%
June	2267	365	16%	1988	372	19%

PCC Children	Contacts 2019	Referrals 2019	%	Contacts 2020	Referrals 2020	%
March	1080	577	53%	1110	203	18%
April	988	508	51%	757	178	24%
May	1175	456	39%	936	203	22%
June	1247	202	16%	1011	189	19%

In terms of core numbers of children open to our respective services, there has been less dramatic change. The following tables provide information about numbers of children subject to child protection plans and who are looked after in the two authorities:

Month 2020	Number of children subject to child protection plan at month end		Number of children in care at month end	
	PCC	CCC	PCC	CCC
March	188	327	741	376
April	208	324	730	381
May	217	320	702	372
June	213	345	708	375

Numbers of children in care in Cambridgeshire have been declining month on month since summer 2019, but remain about the equivalent of the average of our statistical neighbours. If

Cambridgeshire was in line with that average, we would have around 680 children and young people in care.

Numbers on a child protection plan in both authorities has risen slightly; this appears to be more about delays in work taking place and affecting a small number of children and families, as opposed to any increase in numbers becoming subject to a child protection plan.

That said, there was increased activity in relation to s.47 enquiries in Peterborough in the early days of the lockdown. We have reviewed all of those child protection investigations but found no particular pattern or reason for this. In response to this, we implemented an additional screening expectation to ensure that only cases that really need conferencing go through to a formal meeting, and this does seem to have managed the population well.

Performance in relation to visits to vulnerable children has been good in both authorities. The percentage of children subject to child protection plans over the last three months, for example, is as set out in the table below:

Child Protection Statutory Cists			
CCC visits made	CCC %	PCC visits made	PCC %
237	82.90%	163	95.90%
264	94.30%	169	100%
267	95.40%	191	99%
250	96.50%	195	100%

Performance in relation to visits to children and young people in care has been consistently above 90% in both authorities, including virtual visits, and above 95% in Peterborough in May and June.

As a result of the changes to our ways of working, we have reviewed our audit programme and made a number of very responsive changes. The Quality Assurance Service designed a suite of bespoke COVID dip sample audit tools as well as adapting all thematic audit tools to incorporate the COVID context. This incorporated how we are mitigating the COVID social distancing and isolation requirements in visits and direct work with children and families; risk assessment and risk management; assessment and planning; multi-agency working and management oversight.

The focus has been on risk management; keeping children in sight and mind; and what is achievable and proportionate casework in the short term. They have prioritised audits of the children on the Head of Service vulnerable list which includes all children subject to Child Protection Plans as well as others, and this list is reviewed and updated by the teams every week. All quality assurance activity is monitored, reviewed and adapted in line with changes in government guidance and corporate guidance, but most importantly, it is responsive to any lines of enquiry prompted by significant changes in performance data and identified need within the service user base.

We have seen some strong areas of practice responding to the pandemic changed working environment with the vast majority of work has been taking place as appropriate, with children's safety and care planning progressing. The teamwork shown by the whole children's social care service is extremely impressive and is continuing as we move into a new period of change and uncertainty.

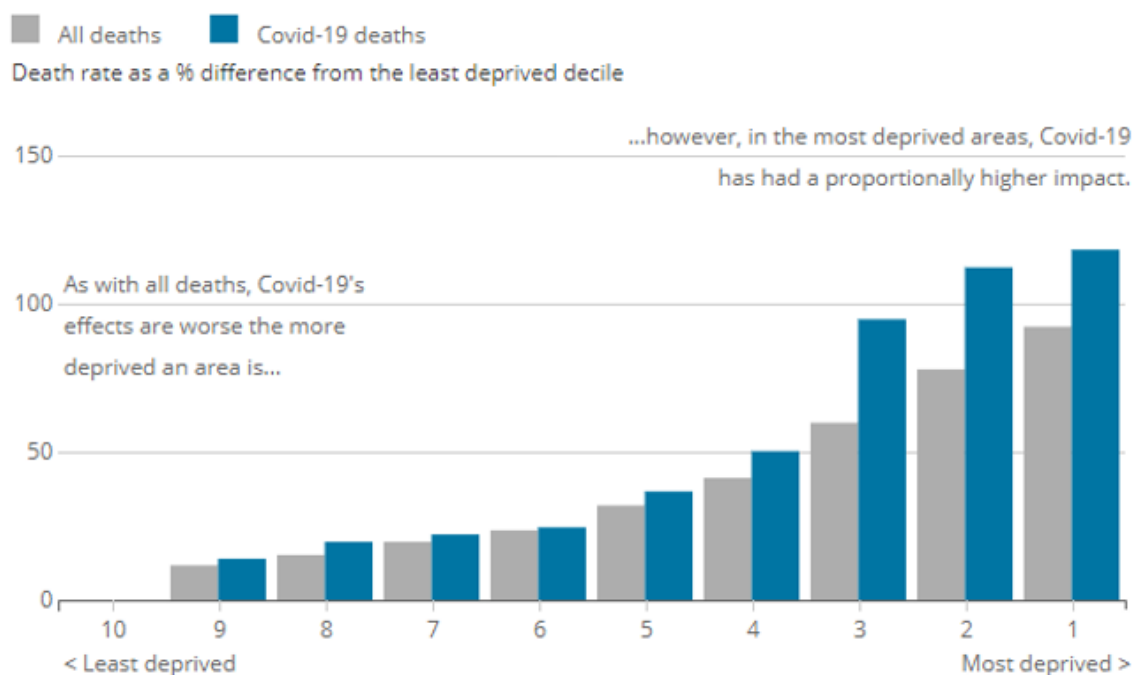
6. WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD

Senior leaders are aware of the challenges we face in resetting services in the medium and long-term future. We cannot predict whether there will be a second wave of Covid-19 or whether lockdown will ease in a linear way over the next coming months. As stated all communities and every aspect of children’s services have been affected by Covid-19, however, the experiences of children and their families will have varied greatly, and for some, this period will have been exceedingly difficult and traumatic.

Although children have been less affected by the virus in terms of infection and mortality rates, we share the concerns raised in the recent Association of Directors of Children’s services (ADCS) ADCS discussion paper ‘Building a country that works for all children post Covid-19’ published in July by about increased exposure to ‘hidden harms’ as well as lost learning and the impact of social distancing on children and young people’s development and on their mental and emotional health and wellbeing, alongside the Covid-19 disruption on professionals’ relationships with children and families and unknown longer-term impact on the voluntary and charitable sector.

Scenario planning is will continue to take place across both authorities to try and determine the likely impact on children, young people and families generally, as well as on those we know are likely to be more significantly adversely affected by Covid-19 and any economic downturn following the lockdown.

Specifically, we know that families who were already struggling as a result of economic disadvantage will be adversely impacted by Covid-19 and the fallout from the pandemic. In the short term, deaths from Covid-19 are higher in our most disadvantaged communities:



Source: Office for National Statistics - Deaths involving COVID-19

Black and minority ethnic communities are more likely to be living in areas of deprivation and to face a greater risk of dying as a result of Covid-19, meaning that a disproportionate number of children from those communities are likely to have experienced grief and loss in their wider families.

More generally, families living in more deprived communities are also likely to be living in poor and less secure housing, which is more likely to be overcrowded and less likely to have outside space. Families living in these communities are likely to have found it harder to support children in engaging with on-line learning. Meanwhile, the physical and social development of children is likely to have been affected more than their peers living in more affluent areas.

Around 25% of all employees aged between 16 and 64 across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire have been supported by the government's furlough scheme. It is unclear how many of these employees will be retained by their employers as this scheme winds down. We have already seen an increase in the number of universal credit claims of more than 300% in our more deprived communities.

There is clear evidence that children living in households affected by sustained poverty are likely to have significantly poorer lifelong outcomes. While it is clear that there will be an economic impact from the pandemic, we do not yet know how quickly the economy is likely to recover. The deeper and longer lasting any post-pandemic recession, the more severe the impact is likely to be on children and young people, and particularly those from more vulnerable communities.

For vulnerable young people, the risk of disengagement from school, increased vulnerability to not being in education, employment or training is also a particular concern.

Those who were already struggling in education will be likely to find it most difficult to return to school in the autumn. Continuing disengagement in formal learning increases the risks of being groomed for criminal exploitation, involvement in offending behaviour and similar.

For young people more generally, there are already indications of an increase in mental and emotional ill-health for which existing mental health services that are already stretched in meeting demand, may struggle to support.

Those young people who have recently entered the employment market, or who are due to do so over the summer, may struggle to remain in or find employment. Young people tend to begin their working lives in those sectors that are likely to be among the worst affected by any economic downturn. There is a risk that young people who find themselves in this situation may struggle to enter work for a long time; longitudinal research following the recession in the 1980s found that young people who did not find work on leaving formal education continued to be at high risk of precarious employment and cyclical unemployment for much of their working lives.

Added to this is the uncertainty as to whether there will be a second wave of the pandemic, and any local or national lockdowns in the coming months. Such events could result in a further reduction in the visibility of children and young people, with consequent impact on any backlog in need. This would also create further concerns about safeguarding issues not being picked up due to school closures etc. as well as a further impact on resource relating to staff sickness / shielding.

Staffing

We recognise that our workforce is our most important resource. It is important that we do all we can to support staff during this difficult period. Staff want to continue working wherever they can, but we need to recognise that for many with children, flexibility in what they can do and when they can work, along with the hours they are able to do so, will be important. We will ensure each individual's case should be considered on its own merit and sensitively.

Due to the swift transition to home working, staff availability in children's services has remained relatively stable but the roll-out of the national test, track, trace and isolate system may introduce levels of volatility not yet seen during the pandemic.

Some other potential consequences of the pandemic include that some members of staff are finding that they have built up significant amounts of leave and while we have agreed to some additional capacity to carry forward leave into following years, the priority is to encourage leave to be taken. This is both to avoid risk of staff burn-out as well as to try to ensure that leave is taken in a way that enables the service to continue to operate.

Demand

We are using our performance data to identify areas where we think demand will increase for the future – for example, it is anticipated that there will be a higher number of young people at risk of becoming NEET in the next academic year as much of the face-to-face preparations for this transition from statutory education has not been able to take place. As in other aspects of impact, the effects are likely to be most marked for the most vulnerable young people including care leavers, a disproportionate amount of whom are unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in both authorities.

There may also be an increasing demand on the placements service as the moves that have been on hold during lockdown are allowed to progress.

There have been some activities that have been stopped or substantially reduced. A lot of these activities will need to be restarted, but for others there are opportunities to consider whether they need to be delivered at the same level as before, given the wider support networks and other available provision which families and young people have been able to access.

We are predicting some areas of increased demand. We are aware that the risk of domestic violence was greater during lockdown, with victims being in closer proximity with their abuser with no outlets to socialise. The added pressures of financial constraints, home schooling and no privacy could add conflict within relationships especially in relationships already characterised by domestic abuse. Lockdown may be deterring victims from seeking help due to the fear of being overheard on the phone/lack of opportunity to reach out, so we could expect to see a rise in DV notifications once lockdown restrictions start to ease.

As noted above, in the longer term we are concerned about the impact of vulnerable young people who were already becoming disengaged with education prior to the lockdown. These young people may experience greater emotional and mental health vulnerabilities. They may also be at increased risk of criminal exploitation. Increase in demand as a result will not happen overnight; it will be most likely to have a more gradual impact over the coming months and even years.

Similarly, families who were already financially excluded or facing other vulnerabilities including reduced emotional and mental health resilience, where parents were already struggling with managing routine and experiencing stress on a number of fronts including poorer housing, housing and employment insecurity, are also at risk of significantly poorer outcomes developing over time.

Funding

The funding position facing the two authorities is very different. While both face significant challenges resulting from increased demand on a whole range of services coming at the same time as a significant drop in income, Cambridgeshire County Council has a healthier reserves position on which it can draw should this be necessary. This is not an option for Peterborough, however.

All areas of both councils have developed business cases detailing the likely increased in resources needed to meet a growth in demand. For both authorities, these business cases envisage the need for increased early help support, particularly in the weeks following the return to school in the autumn term, as some families struggle to re-establish routines.

Similarly, we have developed business cases in each authority that are based on an assumption that there will be some increased demand for children's social care, and these have modelled a likely increase in capacity in assessment, followed by some increase in demand in our Family Safeguarding teams.

Finally, there are business cases in each authority estimating likely increased costs of placements for children in care. While neither authority has seen an increase in numbers in care to date, there is a concern that the placement market continues to be very stretched. Any increase in demand for placements nationally as well as locally may well see a further shortage of foster placements. This can have the consequence of an increased use of the highest cost residential placements, increasing unit costs accordingly.

While numbers of children open to the service across all stages has remained relatively constant, there have been some delays in progressing some plans for children. Delays in delivering the outcomes associated with a child in need or a child protection plan in an environment of reduced visiting and direct work are very likely, for example. The impact of these delays are likely to still be being felt as any increase in demand begins to feed into systems.

This means that it will be of even greater importance that we are able to accurately monitor and dynamically forecast demand across services. In order that we achieve this, we will:

- Continue to track the impact of activity as we start to resume more face to face delivery of services with oversight through our DMT meetings.
- Review and further refine medium and longer term plans considering pressures and opportunities aligned to our service plans, learning from our Covid-19 response and emerging national and international evidence.
- Using digital workshops / staff surveys we will engage staff in the development of medium- and longer-term proposals for change.
- Identify appropriate opportunities for engagement of young people and communities in the development of 'the Reset plan'.
- Track and plan for medium term demand and consequent financial impact.

We are working with Business Intelligence to develop indicators that provide us with some early information about likely changes or increases in demand. The strength of the Sector-Led improvement programme of the Eastern Region is that we can also learn from the experience of others, and compare our experience with the experience of other authorities regionally, as well as from national data.

Relationships such as these will be of great importance as we continue to map and predict a changing impact resulting from the pandemic.

7. *HOW SERVICES WILL RESPOND*

The precise way that service will respond will of course depend on the emerging pattern of needs as the pandemic and the implications form it continue to play out. As noted above, we expect to see some or all of the following to take place:

- An increase in financial hardship and attendant consequences across all communities, but likely to be most concentrated in those that are already most disadvantaged;
- A larger number of families struggling to manage when they otherwise would have done as the impact of Covid-19 continues financially, as well as because of increased mortality and severe ill-health;
- A widening of the attainment gap for vulnerable pupils;
- An increased risk of young people being not in education, employment, education or training, again particularly affecting our most vulnerable communities and including young people leaving care;
- Some children suffering additional harm as a result of being less visible to services during the lockdown;
- Some plans for children not progressing as quickly as they might otherwise have done because of restrictions on face to face work;
- A risk that some young people who were already becoming marginalised from formal education prior to the lockdown will find it much more difficult to return to school, with the consequence that they may be more at risk of and/or sexual criminal exploitation;
- That some children with complex disabilities and/or special educational needs find re-integration into school and support services more challenging;
- A potential shortfall in foster placements and placements for young people with more complex needs, reducing placement choice and matching and potentially increasing costs.

We have worked hard to mitigate against these risks, alongside key partner agencies including schools. We have continued to carry out face to face visiting to all of our most vulnerable children throughout the pandemic, for example. We have worked hard to support placements for children and young people in care through the provision of a variety of wrap-round services, and foster carers in both authorities have gone above and beyond to support our children and young people in care.

We have swiftly adapted to new technology to support families, children and young people. The drop in services and on-line parenting support available through our early help offer has, for example, been very effective. Many families have found access to this form of support easier, and it is particularly positive for families living in isolated communities without transport. Virtual engagement with older children and young people has also been an effective means of communication.

Our community hubs have worked tirelessly to support communities throughout the pandemic.

In Cambridgeshire, we have continued to roll out the Family Safeguarding approach, successfully recruiting additional social worker capacity alongside practitioners able to support adults in the family with issues relating to substance and problematic alcohol misuse, domestic abuse and mental ill health. This means that these teams are ready to offer a multi-disciplinary response to families facing complex challenges.

These responses to need throughout the pandemic provides strong foundations as we work across the partnership to address any emerging areas of additional need.

The close relationships between schools, community hubs and our early help services has provided an extra layer of support for vulnerable families. These relationships will continue as schools deliver additional capacity to enable pupils to catch up on learning that they may have missed during the pandemic.

The move to a hybrid model of engagement to include some face-to-face and some on line support to families has the potential to increase reach and accessibility, improving support to families and outcomes for children, on a more sustainable basis than any approach based solely on face-to-face interventions.

Prior to the pandemic, key partners [the local authority, health and the police] jointly commissioned a review of how we could better focus our services to prevent vulnerable young people from developing serious self-harming and other mental health difficulties, and/or becoming at risk from criminal and sexual exploitation or involved in serious offending behaviour.

This work has been slowed by the lockdown, but has continued. Implementing the findings, which include the development of a much more joined up approach to supporting excluded young people, will help us to manage the potential consequences to vulnerable young people arising from the lockdown.

The positive energy and outcomes delivered by the community hubs is something that we are determined does not dissipate as we return to 'normal'. We have discussed how to build stronger, more resilient communities for a long time now; the pandemic has helped to turbo-charge this work, and again places our response to individual and community need on a much more sustainable footing.

Members in both local authorities remain highly committed to children's services and to ensuring that we have the resources we need to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and provide effective safeguarding to those who require it. Our staff team, meanwhile, have further evidenced their commitment to achieving the same ends.

While making precise predictions about the short and long term implications of the pandemic is impossible, meaning that our response to Covid-19 will need to remain under continuous review, the actions we have taken to date places us in a strong position to meet the challenge.