



**To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board**

**On: 20 August 2020**

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**Report by: Director of Children's Services**

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**Heading: Service Update**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides an update to the Education and Children's Services Policy Board with a summary of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the areas within the Board's remit since March 2020. It also outlines the key priorities and areas of risk through to autumn, highlighting any key areas of risk.
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## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that members of the Education and Children's Services Policy Board:
- note the content of this report
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## **3. Background**

- 3.1 In March 2020, working closely with our partners, Renfrewshire Council moved quickly to respond to the emerging coronavirus pandemic, protecting and supporting our employees and communities, particularly vulnerable people across the area.
- 3.2 Colleagues across the Council have shown great commitment and resilience during the covid-19 delivering essential services, volunteering to support frontline services and helping others to remain safe at home.

- 3.3 In order to ensure effective decision-making and governance, the Emergencies Board was convened on 20 March 2020 and has received regular updates on the different workstreams established to support Renfrewshire throughout the crisis, highlighting the humanitarian response, reviewing the available data showing the impact on Renfrewshire's people and considering how we can restart services, recover and renew. Detailed reports were also presented to the Council on 25 June 2020.
- 3.4 This report is therefore not intended to provide granular detail of the response, it is to give a broad overview of the key areas impacted by the Covid-19 crisis – the service areas paused and restarted, the particular areas of focus now and in the near future and any specific risks and priorities of relevance to this Policy Board.
- 3.5 Whilst this report is a high-level update for Elected Members, we are acutely aware of the impact on our communities of the pandemic - of those who have sadly been bereaved, who have struggled through isolation, have lost their income, have had their health impacted through this crisis, have supported their children and young people with home learning or have contended with other challenges made more difficult by the pandemic and consequent restrictions . Across services, and with our partners, the Council continues to support our communities and develop our operational and policy response both now and as we continue to move through the recovery route map.
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#### **4. Updates for Education and Children's Services Policy Board**

- 4.1 Early years provision and schools closed on 20 March 2020, with education moving entirely to a home-based setting thereafter. This was a mixture of paper-based and online learning and 650 Chromebooks and 330 dongles were distributed to local families to support this and mitigate the impact of digital exclusion. Pupils returned to full-time education in school or nursery from 12 August 2020, but with appropriate protective and hygiene measures in place.
- 4.2 Throughout the period of the school closure, schools provided a range of paper-based and online learning materials, with learning and creative activities provided every week day. Pastoral support was also in place. Where required, additional support was available through places in childcare hubs or individualised support from services such as Home Link. Education and social work staff worked closely together to identify those families who might benefit from extra support.
- 4.3 Local authorities were required to provide childcare for key workers during the lockdown and subsequent phases until childcare providers were able to restart care. Renfrewshire Council operated 8 childcare hubs for typically 300-350 children per week. This provision continued during the summer holiday and closed on 6 August 2020 to allow for cleaning of school premises before pupils returned. Contingency plans were in place should national guidance change and childcare be required beyond that date.

- 4.4 Local authorities were required to put measures in place to support children who would no longer receive a free school meal each day as a result of the closure. Renfrewshire Council opted to make a cash payment per child per week of £11.25, and these payments continued throughout the summer, and based this on family entitlement to a clothing grant rather than just free school meals. Payments were also provided to eligible families with children of nursery age. More than 6,700 children were supported in this way.
- 4.5 Children and Families Social Work continued to support service users with the highest levels of needs and risks. Whilst social work offices were mainly closed, a single office remained open with senior management cover each week day. Home visits for all children on the child protection register took place at least fortnightly in all but exceptional cases (for example, where a household was displaying Covid-19 symptoms, or a child was shielding). Contact was then managed in other ways. Regular contact was also maintained between social work staff and all looked after children and care leavers.
- 4.6 From mid-July, social work premises began to re-open to facilitate contact visits between family members and to provide digitally-enabled meeting space for families to support key processes continuing to take place online.
- 4.7 Criminal Justice Social Work also continued to support those service users with the highest levels of needs and/or risks. MAPPA processes continued throughout and vulnerable service users were able to access support in different ways. Much of the Unpaid Work service had to be paused and courts granted all those on orders an additional year to complete their unpaid work requirements; some work was able to continue, including support for women on orders. Contact has remained in place for service users and frequency is based on an assessment of risk and need, but this has been about managing risk rather than delivering interventions. Court processes were temporarily halted resulting in a backlog of cases to be heard and therefore background reports to be undertaken. Social work staff are expected to be able to return to court buildings in August.

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## **5. Key priorities and risks until next board cycle**

- 5.1 The Scottish Government has announced an extension to the deadline for the rollout of 1140 hours of early years provision for all 3 and 4 year olds, which was originally scheduled to be fully implemented by August 2020. The restrictions of lockdown and the early phases of recovery have disrupted the construction work necessary to enable the increase in capacity. Much of the required recruitment had already taken place prior to lockdown though there remains a nationwide challenge around the size of the workforce. There are already children in Renfrewshire in receipt of 1140 hours and expansion will continue to be rolled out throughout 2020/21.

- 5.2 Education establishments have contingency arrangements in place should any further local or national lockdowns be required. As the expectation until the end of June was that a blended learning model would be in place from August, detailed plans had already been prepared and scrutinised positively by Education Scotland. These can be implemented rapidly in the event of any second phase of Covid-19 infections. The lessons learned from the lockdown phase have been documented and are informing the recovery plan as education services 'Build Back Better'.
- 5.3 Supporting the health and wellbeing of all children and young people will be central to a return to school; they must feel safe, confident and engaged in their surroundings. Teachers and early years practitioners will work with children and young people to gain insight into their lockdown experience and plan appropriate revision and next steps for learning and wellbeing. Additional individual supports will be put in place where required. Children from P6 upwards will take part in our Skills for Recovery programme in the first six weeks, while younger children will be guided through other wellbeing programmes. Outdoor learning and learning through play will be a key feature for younger children, and PSE classes for older children will have a focus on mental, emotional and social wellbeing.
- 5.4 Core protection services continued to operate throughout lockdown, as noted in paragraphs 4.4 – 4.6 above. The relaxing of restrictions has allowed for an increase in face-to-face work beyond those core services protecting the most vulnerable. There have been no specific dates provided for the resumption of 'normal' social work services in the national routemap, but the service will continue to risk assess and implement distancing measures as appropriate, in line with generic national guidance.
- 5.5 The Unpaid Work team have been delivering a limited service but will continue to operate at significantly reduced capacity until further notice, due to the need to observe strict social distancing and enhanced hygiene measures. Scottish courts have already granted an extension to the completion date of one year for all orders with an element of unpaid work in recognition of this. This, combined with the challenges already arising from the extension of the presumption against short sentences. Some other Criminal Justice Social Work services have been able to resume but not all groupwork has been able to resume, as a result of the continued need for distancing and additional hygiene measures.
- 5.6 In terms of risk, the Board should note that the Corporate Risk Management Group is undertaking a piece of work to review the council's risk profile in light of the pandemic; many of the existing strategic and corporate risks will be impacted. These risks will be reported to the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board in November. At this point in time however, the Board will wish to note that the service-specific risks relating to our recovery work and immediate concerns between now and the next cycle of Board meetings are:
- Maintaining appropriate levels of staffing to allow for a full-time return to face to face learning and a resumption of face-to-face contact for social work service users;

- Balancing the need to operate ‘normally’ with a need to have robust and detailed contingency arrangements, regularly updated in line with current guidance, in place in the event of a second phase and restrictions being re-imposed;
- Supporting all service users and staff in relation to their emotional wellbeing and the potential impact of the pandemic on that wellbeing;
- Managing the impact on learning and attainment, in particular the poverty-related attainment gap;
- Managing the expected increase in requests for support and/or referrals to social work from other agencies, as a result of the pandemic and its consequences;
- Managing the additional pressures on criminal justice social work as court backlogs and extensions to orders are dealt with, particularly in relation to unpaid work where physical distancing will significantly reduce the capacity of the service.

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## Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – None
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None
3. **Community/Council Planning** – Covid-19 will impact on the operations of Council partners and on services to the community. This paper highlights the work being undertaken to mitigate this impact as far as possible and maintain essential services for the safety and wellbeing of the community.
4. **Legal** – None
5. **Property/Assets**- as facilities start to open in line with the Scottish Government Routemap, adjustment may have to be made to physical spaces to allow for physical distancing and to comply with relevant guidance. This will also apply to outdoor assets.
6. **Information Technology**- ICT are working to ensure staff have the capability to work from home wherever possible to reduce social contact in line with government and health guidance. Digital learning remains a contingency in the event of restrictions being re-imposed.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** – The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals’ human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. However, the service notes the scientific advice in relation to risks to particular groups and communities from Covid-19 and is undertaking individualised risk assessments wherever appropriate.

8. **Health & Safety** – Advice and guidance is being given to protect the health and safety of employees and service users when carrying out priority services for the Council in line with government and health guidance
9. **Procurement** – The ongoing pandemic has and will continue to have a significant impact on existing contractual obligations and on the procurement of future goods and services required by the Council.
10. **Risk** – As noted in section 5, the CRMG are currently reviewing the Council's risk profile in light of the coronavirus pandemic and will report to board in November.
11. **Privacy Impact** – None.
12. **CoSLA Policy Position** – None
13. **Climate Risk** – None

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**List of Background Papers** - None

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**Author: Lisa Fingland, Service Planning and Policy Development Manager  
(Children's Services)**