

## **Appendix - Additional information for People Scrutiny Committee provided by Children's Services**

The full cabinet report details the wider implications as of 30 June on all vulnerable groups. This report examines the implications for Dorset Children from that report.

The identified risks to children and young people within the cabinet report were:

- (a) The mental health and wellbeing of children
- (b) Increased vulnerability due to economic hardship, in particular lack of food for young people.
- (c) The impacts for children and young people who were either medically vulnerable or extremely medically vulnerable.
- (d) Inequitable impacts on children who have particular needs.
- (e) The impacts of household domestic abuse and other social disharmony in families.

To address the issues highlighted above Children's Service were engaged in cross council work with other directorates of the council, other agencies for example Public Health and the NHS and with community and voluntary groups.

In order to maintain effective provision for young people in schools a strong working partnership was formed with a group of experienced headteachers and academy trust CEOs. The purpose of this group was to maintain effective consultation, communication and develop cohesive approaches through the school system.

Dorset schools have remained open to the children in vulnerable groups throughout the pandemic. These have included children with a social worker, children with special needs and the children of critical workers.

The attendance and support for vulnerable children has been supported through the use of a tracking tool, developed within the council and in partnership with schools. This has allowed the effective coordination of risk assessments from social care, early help services, SEND service and schools. Vulnerable children were contacted regularly and some 5000 children were monitored. As a coordinated group of professionals it was possible to maintain contact with children and families regularly. Attendance at school was tracked.

The leadership within Children's Services have supported schools with risk assessing and planning the wider return of children to schools. This preparation was essential for the wider opening of schools from 1 June and continues as schools prepare to open fully in September.

Close working with schools, including special schools and with the Dorset Parent Carer Council has enabled families with children which have special needs to be supported.

To support families who struggle with providing food for children a scheme where schools could access free school meals vouchers was instigated rapidly and supported schools until the Department for Education scheme was available to them. This included provision for the Easter and half-term holidays.

Social work and early help work has continued throughout the Covid period. There have been depressed safeguarding referrals from school over the period and there is some consideration that there may be an increase in September when schools return full time. Demand has remained steady throughout the period. It is to the credit of social care and early help staff that visiting has continued throughout the period.

The provision of residential places for children in care has been more challenging during the Covid period. This has been managed by daily meetings around high risk cases and extensive searches for placements. Foster carers have been supported by additional payments during the Covid period to help them manage extra costs and the council would like to thank them for their work during this most challenging of times.

To support children and families Children's Services are supporting a "Summer in Dorset". This is a community-based programme which will be targeted at families we know and has the intention of bridging the gap between the end of term and school restarting. This will support children's wellbeing over the summer.

Through the shielding programme, which was a coordinated response to the need for the most vulnerable to stay home during an extended period of Covid, children's services supported families with children who were unable to attend schools.

Significant challenges to families and children remain as we emerge from the initial effects of the Covid infection. Children's Services will be responding to these for many years to come.