

## Safeguarding Service Plan

In light of the Covid 19 Pandemic and additional Welsh Government restrictions to reduce the spread of coronavirus and protect public health in Bridgend issued on the 22nd September 2020 the service has reviewed this Plan ensuring that we continue to work in a way which prioritises the most at risk and the most vulnerable children and families who are known to the service. It is becoming clear that we will continue to work with some level of restrictions for many months ahead.

Regular meetings continue to take place at all managerial levels to review the most effective approach to deliver our services balancing the safest and most effective way in which to respond to the pandemic whilst adhering to the Government's guidance.

At this stage staff in general where possible will need to continue to work from home and this could be due to a number of factors including the need to follow social distancing measures, staff needing to socially isolate and / or due to individuals caring responsibilities. Managers will continue to discuss with you individually your personal circumstances to support you and keep you safe. The only exceptions to this will be in respect of staff who are in roles defined as business critical, which require them to work within council premises. Where appropriate you can request a risk assessment from your team manager to assess whether you can work within council offices at specified times in order to undertake business critical functions.

We appreciate that staff will have commitments during these challenging times and that each of your circumstances are unique.

### **Safeguarding**

Children's Social Care continue to provide a skeleton service from within Ravens Court offices operating a central point of contact from which calls from families and professionals on open cases can be taken and then directed to the appropriate team member and their Manager. If the matter is deemed urgent then the relevant team manager will be telephoned to arrange a proportionate response. A weekly staff rota continues to be co-ordinated to ensure the Central Team is appropriately staffed. These staff are taking phone calls but do not undertake pieces of work such as strategy discussions or home visits.

Staff working within the Central Team are being provided from Safeguarding West, East, North, DCT, 16+ and the fostering service. It is critical that all staff working within the Central Team and other council premises that are used observe social distancing.



Whenever required we will work together as one Children's Social Care team to support each other in responding to staffing shortages, CP concerns on open cases and potential placement breakdowns.

The MASH wing remains open to IAA staff and partner agencies although they attend on a rota basis to ensure the workspace is compliant with social distancing rules.

### **Interim arrangements for Contact and keeping in touch:**

At the outset of the current Pandemic we took the very difficult decision to temporarily stop face-to-face contact between children and their families. Families and foster carers were informed of this decision and were supported to understand our rationale and what alternative options for contact were being established.

Creative ways were developed to ensure contact between children and their families was maintained. All foster carers have been able to facilitate and supervise contact between children and their parents virtually and have received on-line training to support them to undertake this role.

We are now at a stage where Welsh Government support the gradual return of our routine contact with and between families in a proportionate way. Of course we must still follow social or physical distancing guidance. When considering in-person and face to face contact, we must continue to risk assess on a case by case basis and we have developed a risk assessment template, which enables us to do this.

In cases of sibling contact, or where foster carers are able to supervise/support face to face contact for children in their care in line with the latest WG guidance, foster carers will be supported to consider the reintroduction of in-person contact in outdoor spaces, in line with social distancing guidance, or in suitable community venues where it is agreed by both parties and where those venues can comply with social distancing and hygiene requirements.

Contact should also continue to be maintained through daily or regular phone calls, video chats, the use of social media platforms or other means.

However, when considering face to face contact where staff will be required to supervise, the latest guidance is that we should give consideration to a two stage risk assessment process - based upon an assessment of both necessity and risk. **All risk assessments referred to in this guidance will now incorporate these two elements as follows:**



### Assessment of necessity

- whether remote communication has been utilised and is no longer deemed effective
- there are particular concerns present or action needed where a home visit, in-person interaction or physical sight of a child is required
- where physical contact will aid a positive placement, support a successful transition, or is deemed particularly beneficial for wellbeing and mental health

### Assessment of risk

- the health, vulnerability and personal circumstances of the worker and any person they are going to see face to face, particularly taking into account if any of the individuals are in the '[increased risk group](#)' or '[shielding group](#)' and ensuring that no face to face appointments take place where any of the individuals (regardless of vulnerability) are displaying symptoms of COVID-19.
- whether the proposed meeting is an area in which social distancing can be enabled
- considering the age and understanding of any child and / or adult involved, whether several children will be present, or whether there are additional complexities linked to impairment or understanding
- the use of protective equipment and the potential impact this will have on the proposed interaction

On the 4<sup>th</sup> August 2020, the Local Authority increased the numbers of children having face to face contact with their family. Face to face contacts can proceed in the following circumstances:

- New Born and very young babies to support parental attachment
- Children where there is a strong family attachment
- Where re-habilitation is part of the child's Care Plan
- Final/Goodbye contact
- Sibling contact

Prior to any face to face contact taking place, a risk assessment will need to be completed and agreed by a Principal Officer, Group Manager or Head of Service before such contact is arranged.



To minimise the risk of infection the following steps will need to be adhered to:

- All parties involved in the Contact will need to agree to follow the actions/restrictions set out in the Risk Assessment
- Wherever possible the contact will take place outdoors
- Where supervised contact takes place indoors social distancing needs to be maintained
- PPE will be used by staff and family members during which all contact sessions that take place indoors.
- 3 x rooms have been identified for face to face contact, 1 at Y Dderwen and 2 at Pyle Life Centre
- Following each contact the room will be cleaned

Following the new restrictions being placed on the Local Authority on 22.9.20, staff are required to review all contact arrangements where children or young people have been visiting family/friends homes for face to face contact, as these arrangements will not be compliant with the updated restrictions. Any forms of unsupervised contact that are taking place in the community, should also be reviewed to ensure that they are compliant with the new requirements.

We will continue to liaise closely with the Children's Guardian in terms of contact arrangements between children and their birth family where cases are within Care Proceedings.

Any proposed changes to contact for cases which are not currently in court should be discussed with the IRO and recorded. All IROs continue to work at home at present and can be contacted via telephone or virtually by practitioners or partner professionals.

Social Workers are required to email the lawyers on those cases currently in court to outline any new arrangements and reasons for the change in contact.

Child Care Lawyers have asked that **Court assessments** (not child protection assessments) to be undertaken via alternative means including telephone and skype/FaceTime between the SW and the parent/s/family members being assessed. Please can you note those sessions which are facilitated in this way in your assessment document. However, if it is assessed that it is necessary to see a parent or family member as part of this assessment, this visit can be agreed if a Team Manager signs off a risk assessment.



If you or SWs need anything the lawyers and paralegals are continuing to work as normal at home and can be contacted via their phone numbers which link up to the laptops.

### **Care and support:**

As a general rule Care and Support cases will only be visited if it is risk assessed to be necessary following receipt of a child protection concern or where there is concern around family breakdown. Otherwise contact via the telephone is adequate. It is important that the Team Manager and the relevant case holder records the rationale regarding not visiting a family on WCCIS, and also agrees a schedule of support which must be followed by the case holder. If a risk assessment deems a visit to be necessary it should not take place without the authorisation of a Team/Deputy Manager. See Appendix A regarding the triage process in respect of visiting homes.

There may however be grounds for the frequency of contact to be gradually increased and a visit arranged based on information about the care and support needs of the child at the time and in line with Welsh Government guidance the two part risk assessment should be considered before any visit is undertaken (Necessity and risk).

### **Interim Child Protection visits:**

In Bridgend home visits to families where children's names are placed upon the Child Protection Register were taking place on a monthly basis as a starting point until July 2020

We have now reintroduced face to face contact with children on the CPR with safeguarding visits to see children returning to being carried out at least every 10 working days. If following a two stage risk assessment a decision is taken that this requirement should be met through other remote/virtual contact then this decision must be agreed by a member of the senior management team.

Where social workers and other staff are undertaking home visits, the PPE and social distancing guidance must be applied. Screening calls should be made to parents/carers ahead of a visit to ascertain the family's circumstances. Limits in the contact that universal and preventative services now have with children and families will put some children at greater risk. Some children and families may need more frequent contact as a result of this and decisions should be made on a case by case basis informed by on-going risk assessment.



Other professionals who are also in contact with the family are providing any other relevant information in respect of when they have kept in touch or sighted the child (ren) or family.

Please note that on any visit that will take place indoors a face mask must be worn, and social distancing adhered to wherever this is possible.

## **Child Protection Conferences**

See appendix B.

## **Core groups:**

Core groups continue to take place via telephone conference or individual telephone calls to monitor the progress of the Child Protection Plan. How the information will be gathered and shared will be dependent upon the level of risk associated with the child/ren. The collation of this information should be undertaken by the relevant case holder. It is recognised that the information may be very limited in the present climate. However a clear record of the decisions taken, any changes in level of risk and the response to these should be maintained.

## **LAC visits:**

We are now in a position where Statutory Visits to children who are looked after can begin to be re-introduced on a face to face basis. Where it is appropriate contact between foster families/carers and Looked After children can continue to take place via telephone, Skype etc. and the level of contact needs to be considered on a case by case basis. The rationale in respect of this changed visiting pattern should be recorded by the case holder, following a discussion with their team manager. Where a visit is deemed necessary to a foster placement for the purpose of undertaking a Statutory Visit to a Looked After Child this should be considered in line with the two part risk assessment highlighted above. If the visit is deemed necessary then a risk assessment should be completed, and signed off by a Team Manager.

The Fostering Team have created a database whereby they have placed a RAG status against all in house placements to indicate the vulnerability of the placement in terms of breakdown. The team will liaise with the relevant Social Workers to ensure that the level and type of support the placement requires is contained within this information. It is anticipated as time passes this picture will change and as such, it will be continuously updated to minimise potential placement breakdown. The Fostering Team continue to liaise with Independent Fostering Agencies in respect of the packages of support that will be provided to this placements during this period.



Please note that for any visit that takes place indoors a face mask must be worn, and that social distancing should be adhered to wherever this is possible.

## Court Hearings:

By way of summary and importance for your teams:

- **All hearings will be remote via the Court's Cloud Video Platform (CVP) or telephone.** Whilst SW's are not expected to be present at the Hearing, they must:
  - Ensure that the solicitor is fully instructed on all issues needed for the hearing. This can be facilitated via email or telephone conversation with the solicitor.
  - Be available during the hearing via phone in case the solicitor needs to contact them on an issue. Please can the SW provide the solicitor with the necessary number to contact them.
  - If a Social Worker is requested to give evidence, and is unable to give evidence from home, there are meeting rooms available on Wing 4 of Ravens Court which can be booked for this purpose.

If you or SWs need anything the solicitors and paralegals are continuing to work as normal at home and can be contacted via their phone numbers which link up to the laptops.

## Legal Surgery/Legal Planning Meetings

Legal Surgery will continue to take place on a weekly basis making use of Skype and allows for the recording of decision making. Where Social Workers have been requested to complete assessments they should look to do so if it is deemed possible by phone. Legal planners should continue to be completed for Legal Surgery. Decision making by the Principal Officer/Group Manager will be recorded on to the standard legal surgery templates. Legal Planning meetings will continue to take place via Skype where necessary. Parenting assessments will continue where virtually possible, if a visit to a home is required as part of this assessment a risk assessment should be completed and signed off by a Team Manager.

## Fostering Service



## **Fostering/Placements Plan – Corona Virus**

### **Essential Services**

- Foster Panel
- Supervision
- Supporting Foster Carers
- Foster Carer Training and Development
- Annual Reviews
- Duty
- Initial visits/Assessments
- Placement Finding

### **Non-Essential – *Non essential services are suspended subject to review***

- Drop In sessions

### **Foster Panel**

- In order to reduce the risks posed foster panel will take place remotely via Skype.
- Business support are facilitating the Skype calls, e-mailing invites to panel members.
- Carers will not be asked to attend panel but to be available by telephone to ensure they are able to represent their views.
- Assessing/Supervising Social Workers will be asked to attend virtually.
- Child Social Workers will be asked to provide written feedback where required and be available by telephone/Skype for queries as required.
- Ratification to be undertaken virtually.

### **Supervision**

- Social Workers will continue to undertake supervision with their foster carers virtually via telephone/Skype.
- Social Workers to continue to assess the needs of their individual carers and agree when required additional supervision/telephone support.
- In exceptional circumstances visits to the Foster Carers for supervision can take place. However, these can only take place if a two part Risk Assessment has been signed off by a Team Manager.





### **Supporting Foster Carers**

- Fostering Service to maintain a spreadsheet highlighting placements where there are any additional support needs identified.
- Any placements identified with additional support needs (Amber) will be provided with additional telephone contact from their SSW and a conference with the child's SW and additional agencies will be convened via Skype.
- Any Placements that are identified at risk of breakdown (Red) will receive daily contact from the fostering service, 1:1 support from the placement support worker and a review of their support package with other professionals via Skype In the event that the SW feels that a visit to the carers home or Respite is required to provide the necessary support then a two part risk assessment would need to be completed and signed off by a Team Manager before either was progressed.
- Liaison Foster Carers continue to support carers virtually.
- Weekly newsletters are being sent to all foster carers to facilitate communication from the service and to promote the well-being of carers and children in their care.
- Coffee mornings are being held virtually facilitated by the Liaison Foster Carers providing opportunity for the carers to provide informal support to each other.

### **Foster Carer Training and Development**

- All Foster Carers have access to the Virtual Training Hub where they can continue to access a comprehensive package of e-learning.
- Where required the specific training and development will be delivered virtually with individual carers to enable them to meet the needs of the children who are placed in their care.
- Discussion regarding training and development will need to continue to form part of Supervision.

### **Annual Reviews**

- All Annual Reviews are to be undertaken virtually.
- Supervising SW to ensure all information is gathered in line with Regulatory requirements.
- Where necessary Annual Reviews will be considered by the Foster Panel.



## **Duty**

- All staff are working from home but the service continues to operate a daily duty rota.
- Rota is available to the central team and contact details have been provided.
- Foster Carers have all been provided with details as to how they can contact the team.

## **Initial Visits/Assessments**

- Any initial visits that are undertaken will be need to have a risk assessment signed off by the Team Manager, PPE used and social distancing maintained.
- All Assessments are to be undertaken virtually.
- A Skills to Foster Training Workbook has now been developed and where possible will be completed by applicants prior to approval.
- Local arrangements have been agreed for all new applicants to provide a medical summary to support the client's self-reported status and this information is sent to the medical adviser to Panel. In these instances the usual Coram BAAF AHR form should be completed.
- Where we are not able to access any form of medical assessment from a GP, the Self-assessment form should be utilised, and where a Medical Advisor is available to provide comment upon this form, it should be obtained.

## **Placement Finding**

- There are no changes to the referral process for placement finding.
- Arrangements have been made for the placements staff to work from home and can access all relevant information via WCCIS, e-mail and the 4C's information using CCSR.
- The service continues to monitor the number of Foster Care placements available in-house and where appropriate Temporary Changes of Approval or Exemptions are to maintain capacity.
- The Service has developed a spreadsheet that allows them to monitor the stability of each placement both in-house and with independent providers and will deploy additional support where required.

## **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**



- Process to assess and provide support to UASC continue to be maintained for this vulnerable group recognising the need for social distancing and use of PPE where appropriate.

### **Residential Care**

- Each of the Residential Care homes have developed a continuity plan to ensure they can safely remain open to ensure that the children in the home continue to receive the care and support they need.
- Support is being provided by Residential Care to facilitate on-going contact between children and their families. This contact is facilitated making use of technology such as WhatsApp and FaceTime etc.
- In line with Welsh Government Guidance where a child is able to meet with a family member unsupervised, and this contact can take place outdoors, the contact is proceeding once a Risk Assessment has been completed and signed off by a Principal Officer, Group Manager or Head of Children's Services.
- The contact details must be set out within the child's care and support plan and personal plan
- At the current time there are no visitors attending the Residential Homes.

### **Should be Placed**

The Head of Service will continue to undertake this process, but the meetings will take place virtually via conference call where appropriate.

### **Direct Payment Panel**

This panel is now taking place virtually on a monthly basis. Social Workers present their cases on Skype, and all the relevant officers have the relevant technology which allows them to attend this meeting to ensure that the appropriate decisions can be made.

### **Transition Panel**



Transition takes place on a monthly basis via Skype. All panel members are able to attend and contribute, and the decisions made within the panel are recorded by Business Support.

### **Accommodation & Permanence Panel**

Referrals to be sent to Jacquie White (copy Jo Dando) by Thursday. Jacquie will forward to members of the panel with a request to send comments and feedback to me by the close of play Monday. Karin Henderson will review and agree. Karin Henderson will share the decision with the Principal Officer for Case Management and discuss if there is a complex issue. Karin Henderson will complete minutes (brief outline. Karin Henderson will then resend to Jacquie White to add her signature and send minutes/decision to the team manager/social worker).

### **Out of Authority Panel**

An Out of Authority Panel process is to be facilitated remotely. Case Holding Social Workers will be required to provide planners for all children who are placed in OOA Residential Care. These planners will then be circulated to all members for comments/queries. The Head of Children's Social Care will then convene a "panel" via Skype with the Group Manager (Case Management) and Group Manager (Placements and Provider Services) to confirm any ongoing arrangements/future planning. A note of these discussions will be sent back to panel members. However, any urgent issues should be escalated to the Head of Children's Social Care.

### **SMT Arrangements**

The Head of Service and senior managers are primarily working from home. However, they remain available for contact via e-mail, phone, conference call and Skype. The senior managers continue to be primarily responsibility for their areas, and team managers should continue to contact their line managers wherever possible. However the Group Manager for IAA & Safeguarding will have responsibility for the IAA team at Ravens Court, and the Group Manager for Case Management & Transition will have responsibility for the Central team also based at Ravens Court.

### **Western Bay Adoption Service**



The Western Bay Adoption Services (WBAS) staff are predominately all working remotely. WBAS telephone is being managed via an answering machine, messages left are picked up via their admin inbox which is being staffed from home. Calls are directed to the relevant duty officer. There is a daily duty officer for Family finding recruitment and assessment and adoption support. All calls received that day will be provided with an initial response. Business support are now returning to the office on a rota basis and so during these times the telephone number will be in operation, any calls taken will be directed to the relevant worker.

Post is being collected on a regular basis, logged and urgent issues forwarded to the relevant Social Worker.

Adoption Applications staff are accessing the office in order to be able to ensure that there is no delay in adoption applications being processed and sent to the court.

Adoption panel –Approval of adopters. Panel is continuing to run on a weekly virtual basis using Zoom. 8 panel members have been secured who have the appropriate technology to enable them to participate. Adopters can also be brought into the discussion if necessary however this is being avoided with panel identifying questions prior to the panel which can be addressed by the adopters and their assessing social worker. Adopters and social workers are now being invited into the virtual panel to answer any questions that panel may have.

Head of Service ratification – papers are being emailed to the Head of Service to complete ratification in the normal way accessing panel advisor virtually if required. Papers will be emailed to the relevant LA Head of Service to consider the match. Panel advisor will be available via Microsoft teams/telephone if required.

Adoption medicals are currently continuing via virtual means or telephone calls with the medical advisors using the lac medical, their records and discussion with foster carers. Medical advisors have advised that more face to face appointments will now be in operation.

Adoption support –all families open to adoption support will receive a minimum of weekly contact via phone, skype or email. Face to face visits to families are being assessed through using a risk assessment.

Adoption support are running virtual parenting and support groups for adopters.

Adopter assessments – these are continuing as normal via skype/teams. All new enquiries are being responded to immediately via online /skype. Information is being emailed out rather than posted. At least one face to face visit is being undertaken during the assessment process to ensure that the home is seen and health and safety checklist completed.



Family finding – cases will continue to be linked and matched. Linking visits can continue if CSW have access to Teams, FaceTime/skype. Cases will continue to proceed to matching panel. Again some face to face initial visit to adopters are taking place subject to a positive risk assessment.

Introductions – now taking place using the NAS risk assessment which is being completed for all cases post matching panel. The risk assessment considers issues such as final contacts and the health and wellbeing of all involved in the introductions process.

Marketing activity - with the relaxation of lockdown marketing activities will commence again, with focus on social media, city centre advertising and radio campaigns.

## **Advocacy**

TGP are carrying on their service without the face to face contact. TGP are undertaking this by phone calls/texts/FaceTime/WhatsApp video calls and skype. It will be for the young person to express their preference.

Active Offers are still being conducted within the 5 day timescales and TGP are completing the active offer meeting with young people as above and then sending out the advocacy packs to them either via post or email so they are clear on our roles and also have the information TGP give out re; Child line ,MEIC & the Children’s Commissioner.

TGP will continue to support any young people that had LAC reviews and conferences due and advocates will participate in these via Microsoft Teams and ensure they have chatted with young people prior to meeting taking place to ensure they have an up to date account of their wishes & feelings.

From September TGP are still working remotely but are now considering requests for face to face working on a case by case basis. Staff requesting face to face contact with children and young people are asked to provide full details to the senior management team, who assess each request and provide approval (or otherwise).

## **Requests for a Child to become Looked After**

In the event that this has not been agreed in Legal Surgery, the normal processes should be followed wherever possible. The case holder should discuss with their line manager and escalate to their line manager who in turn will speak to their senior managers. If appropriate, legal advice will be sought from Legal Services. In the event that a placement is required the



Group Manager for Regulated Services and the Placements Team should be informed at the first opportunity.

## Child Protection Medicals

CP medicals at this time continue as per our usual process but should difficulties arise then advice/support can be accessed via the Public Protection Nurse in MASH.



Appendix A -  
Telephone Triage of V



Appendix B - IRO  
arrangments Covid 19

