

Service Briefing

Briefing Prepared by R. Breyer, 10.06.2020

Update on the workshop held before the lockdown and next steps.

A family engagement workshop was held before the lockdown, led by Cllr McKinlay supported by ECC Officers. The workshop contained representatives from users of all types of respite, including in-house residential (Maples and Lavender), family based respite (specialist foster carers), and direct payments, whereby families retain the flexibility to make their own arrangements. The users of each type of provision were able to exchange information and views about how they use the provision, what they see as the benefits, what they find challenging about each, and how they would like to see the service shaped going forward. All types of respite are valued highly by those who use them, and some groups are devoted to and passionate about the service they receive, but it is fair to say that all groups learnt from each other. Notes were made and have been fed into the respite workstream of the CYPWD development group.

The plan to hold a further workshop has been delayed due to the pandemic, which caused families to need to focus on keeping their child safe, and has also required a high level of officer capacity. As it is now clear that the pandemic is a longer-term feature of life, the workshops will be reconvened as a priority, using either technological solutions or social distancing as appropriate. Future workshops will contain one representative from each type of provision so that the meetings can make effective contributions to plans going forward.

To include how the service review and future working with service users may need to be reframed if current pandemic restrictions continue for a significant period of time and how much can be progressed remotely.

As referenced above, now that we understand that the pandemic will, in some form, shape how we do things for the foreseeable future, the workshops will be reconvened using the most appropriate available method. The CYPWD development officer has been tasked with setting this up. In terms of actions by officers to deliver on plans made, these can be taken forward with minimal delay as we now have established facilities for remote working.

To include some comment on how the pandemic has impacted on this client group (families retrenched, shielding, schooling etc) and how that may impact on future service provision particularly around addressing anxieties and managing expectations.

Children and young people with disabilities are amongst the most vulnerable in society. In terms of the pandemic, those with health complications are especially vulnerable and often at extremely high risk.

The pandemic and how families have responded to it has shown very clearly that no-one understands this better than families themselves. In very many cases, families

have made the decision to provide maximum protection and safety for their child or young person themselves, shielding them effectively using their own knowledge and listening to the advice of health professionals. Different families have required differing levels of support to achieve this, ranging from minimal to very high.

A significant factor for many families has been the availability of schooling. The provision of schooling has represented a significant challenge for the education system, both in terms of providing on-site provision where families have needed this, and in the input schools have been able to provide to children at home. Different schools have performed differently in the face of these challenges, so the experience of families has been variable across the county. Social care and other partners have endeavoured to support families to mitigate the pressures and challenges (for example by the development of a 'Rapid Response' team). The Essex Family Forum have just finalised a report of a survey into families experience of SEND education provision and this is due to be published in the next few days.

In terms of the impact on future service provision and how we support families going forward, it is too early to give a definitive picture. There are some things we know already, some things we can predict and plan for, and probably some elements that are unknown to us yet, as the course of the pandemic and routes to recovery unfold. What is clear is that the pressure on families has been enormous, and whilst very many families have responded with incredible fortitude and resilience, for some the impact has presented severe challenges.

In social care terms, additional services have been provided to a number of families with significant additional resources required to make these possible. An example would be a young person who has high health needs who is at a residential school during the week, returning home at weekends. As she has been unable to move between school and home due to the risks, the family made the difficult decision that her needs would be best met by remaining in school at weekends. Social care funded the additional provision.

We are currently working with health, education and voluntary sector providers to model emerging needs as children begin to return to school and outside life. This work is in its early stage but planning is taking place across a broad range of need. For example, the pressures and challenges of the pandemic has caused mental health issues for children, young people, and families. We are in discussion with mental health providers about how we jointly meet these challenges.

To include some comment on developing flexibility in the service offer and direct payments provision.

The ambition and strategic aim of the CYPWD service is to achieve a fully flexible offer that gives families genuine choice, and that has sufficient capacity and reliability to meet the need. There are four main strands to a flexible respite offer, brief comments are made on each below.

- a) In-house provision of overnight respite. A three-year commitment was given in November 2019 to make no further changes to the provision at Lavender and Maples while a review of the overall provision was undertaken. Although there

has been some delay caused by the pandemic and by the departure of the senior commissioning officer leading this work, this is now being made a priority. A new commissioning team has been engaged and the terms of an options paper have been established and work begun. A timescale for the paper has not been finalised but November 2020 would be a realistic target.

- b) Independent sector provision. This sector provides essential capacity over a broad geographical area, flexibility to provide additional capacity where required (sometimes at short notice), and in some cases specialist health care that the in-house provision is not able to provide. It is an important element of a flexible and responsive service. However, ECC has not previously commissioned provision from the independent sector across the county, instead 'spot-purchasing' places on an 'as and when' basis. This approach does provide flexibility, but the pandemic has indicated that, in uncertain times, a more predictable purchaser-provider framework may offer greater certainty to all parties, and may encourage more providers into the market. The commissioning team has begun the work of researching this.
- c) Family-based care (specialist foster carers). ECC's fostering service have recruited a new manager tasked with prioritising the recruitment of specialist foster carers for CYPWD. This service is also reviewing rates paid to foster carers with a view to increasing rates to attract or develop experienced carers to ECC.
- d) ECC's Direct Payment rate has recently been significantly increased to £12.91 per hour to enable families to purchase support. Further work is being undertaken to review this rate, to enable families to exercise maximum choice (for example a differential in the rate for overnight provision is under consideration). The regulations around the use of direct payments had already recently been relaxed to give families greater flexibility. Further relaxation has been temporarily introduced during the pandemic phase, as it was not considered fair or helpful to reclaim unspent funds from families where, for example, a PA had been unable to provide a service due to risk or sickness, and where families had sourced creative alternatives.

Opportunity to highlight some of the specific ECC actions taken and provision during the pandemic for vulnerable groups – link with Essex Welfare Service etc.

- a) The Essex Welfare Service has been established and operational, a separate report is requested in respect of this.
- b) A CYPWD 'Rapid Response' team has been set up with partners to address severe pressures caused by children being unable to be in school.
- c) Further temporary flexibility around the use of direct payment has been introduced.
- d) Specific additional resources have been provided to families where these have been necessary (ranging from accommodation, to PPE, to educational materials).
- e) Multi-agency planning around recovery needs has taken place.
- f) A CYPWD Development Team is now fully staffed to support developments in the service going forward.