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This is an update one year on in relation to Children, Families and Education directorate and what a year

Firstly, to say how proud I am and so lucky with the senior management team but all workers in the Children, Education and Families Directorate.

We started the year in January 2020 continuing our journey of excellence to ensure that children were safeguarded and following our annual conversation with Ofsted at the backend of 2019.

The 2020/21 year was to capitalise on the work progressed both in Children's and Education following the positive outcome of the Children's Social Care (CSC) and SEND inspections.

We were fully aware that following our next planned annual conversation in November 2020 CSC would anticipate a focussed visit in early 2021 to validate the continuation of progress and to look to our next innovations and aspirations for our children.

However with Covid the schedule went out the window and we were informed that instead of the annual conversation we would receive an assurance focussed visit in November 2020 – we were ready for this but following the Prime Minister's announcement of further lockdown this was cancelled on the morning it was due to start. Our regulators then combined the separated Education annual conversation on the 9th December 2020 and added in CSC. This was a positive outcome and although not published, confirmed our continued trajectory for children in Bromley. We are likely to have the paused focussed/assurance visit now around March/April 2021 and then will be due for a full inspection in 2022 following the next annual conversation in November 2021.

We are also preparing for our Youth Offending Service (YOS) inspection which again has been postponed until April when the schedule will begin again.

YOS have been working hard to ensure that the new methodology by the youth justice board is adopted is being followed.

We sent our Self Evaluation to the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and they then decide if a visit is needed to validate but wrote to us to confirm that no validation is required – indicating - we know ourselves well and there are no issues of concern for the regulator.

So, in March 2020 Covid marched across the country and we entered our first lockdown. I am proud to say and have reported to this PDS throughout the fantastic work carried out by CSC and Education and in Strategy and Performance teams. All the services pivoted quickly and confidently, and staff responded going above and beyond.

We updated our continuity plans and ensured that I sent a weekly email sent to staff to give updates and issues around: Do we visit families and how; Where do we get PPE; How do we keep children safe; How do we ensure that children do not slip

through – this in particular to those children not known to CSC but vulnerable by virtue of Education Health and Care (EHC) plans and we reviewed with Education over 1900 children to give assurance their needs were being met.

Colleagues in health were redeployed which had a knock on effect for social workers and the multi-agency partnership – this meant that some children were not being seen in schools, nurseries and other locations, health were not visiting due to that redeployment, our short break facility which was crucial to our children with disabilities and their families was closed.

The Local Authority galvanised itself in the pace of rolling out our new laptops to staff and moving to more digital ways of working to promote stay at home if you can.

Our organisational and departmental response to Covid as a Council, was confident and ensured our services continued to keep children and young people safe in Bromley.

- Underneath the overarching Council-wide recovery plan, we had a dedicated departmental recovery plan to manage our response led by the Assistant Director for Strategy, Performance and Corporate Transformation.
- Resilient staffing arrangements: we had over 90% staff working from the start and throughout. Vast majority of staff working from home since March 2020, with a limited number of staff in the Civic (around 11 or 12 social workers with 2 managers and one Head of Service (HOS) on the floor)
- Leadership presence for frontline staff: our 8 Heads of Service worked on a rota basis to attend the Civic Centre site and support workers who were in the office
- Daily HOS Keeping in Touch meetings Chaired by the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care to resolve any issues or anxieties quickly and with this being replicated for Education colleagues.
- No regulatory flexibilities or easements agreed by Government were used by Bromley
- All six Children and Family Centres were initially closed for about three weeks but quickly pivoted to provided support, advice and guidance to our families during lockdown – an instant helpline for telephone and email enquiries was set up.
- The majority of our social work visits were initially conducted virtually in accordance with Government guidelines, but we quickly turned from 'why you should visit a family to why should you not visit' in line with social distancing requirements
- Where home visits were required, an individual risk assessment was undertaken, senior management approval sought, and appropriate PPE provided.

Impact of leaders

- Our social work permanency stands at 85% across children social care and we continue to hold interviews for new staff.
- Our HOS in the Referral and Assessment Service has for the first time recruited 5 permanent team managers, this tier of management is incredibly

difficult in 'normal times' so is outstanding that all 5 joined around the same time and remotely but they have felt supported and valued.

- The Assistant Director for CSC was made permanent in February last year following a period of acting up
- One of our experienced agency Managers was promoted to the permanent post of HOS Safeguarding West.
- We have continued to maintain permanent Heads of Service throughout the division which has given consistency and experience to the workforce.
- We appointed a new Principal Social Worker who also joined us late Summer remotely and she is supporting our newly qualified social workers, our social work academy and training for our Bromley Relationships Model (BRM).
- Our strong performance management framework and our practice review work (audits) continued to ensure an effective 'line of sight' for senior managers and has continued as normal during the pandemic.
- We are still carrying out around 50 audits every six weeks with Covid flexibility built in. It could have been easy to postpone these but we did not want to lose momentum and ensure that we were checking ourselves.
- In addition, we have continued with the Practice Assurance Stocktakes – mini Ofsted - throughout all the service areas.
- We continue with our Practice Improvement Board chaired by an independent ex Ofsted Quality Assurance Officer – these are held quarterly and give assurance to me that we are continuing on the journey to excellence – albeit with a Covid caveat
- As part of our progress the Assistant Director for Strategy, Performance and Corporate Transformation continues to be our challenge in relation to performance and we have maintained very good performance throughout this period.
- Our BRM enables social workers to develop meaningful relationships with our children and their families, our audit and quality assurance approach has validated this together with ongoing compliments from families, children and professionals.
- We reviewed all our cases including those at the MEGA panel to ensure that plans were appropriate, supporting and safeguarding children. All MEGA cases were reviewed every two weeks to ensure safety plans were fit for purpose and multi-agency partners wrapped around these children.
- We shaped our training programmes to reflect emerging training needs during the pandemic, including domestic violence, child sexual exploitation, parental substance misuse, bereavement, professional curiosity.
- Bromley Safeguarding Children's Partnership has provided frequent and routine contingency oversight meetings to focus on our individual and partner collective response to Covid-19.
- Schools continue to be active partners in multi-agency meetings and in providing support to children during lockdown
- Children's Social Care hosted its Annual Staff Conference in September 2020. Two sessions were held with over 200 staff attending with speakers but more importantly keeping in touch with staff.
- Robust financial planning arrangements and budget monitoring are in place to ensure balanced budget for 2021/22

- Thanks to your continued support as Members and Corporate Parents and our Portfolio Holder and the corporate leadership team we ensured that the needs of children were prioritised.
- **Early Intervention and Family Support Services (EIS)** have responded proactively and have remained flexible to meet the needs of our families during the pandemic
- Although our six Children and Family Centres closed initially they quickly offered daily activities online, workshops and activities – cooking and reading - utilising social media and online forums – offered pre booked appointments to health colleagues for those children who were premature or failing to thrive and the centres were Covid safe to support them.
- A Facebook page was created and through the course of its inception has now reached over a 1000 hits.
- They have run sessions for a range of children across our services, including our children looked after and leaving care, the Living in Care Council (LinCC), children accessing services from the Children with Disabilities team and our voluntary sector CASPAR
- During the lockdown, our MASH took a cautious approach and increased step-downs to Early Help Services to ensure ongoing support after an assessment
- A dedicated Early Help Services Team Manager was allocated to all teams within CSC for social workers to call and discuss support options for individual families throughout the child's journey
- Developed a range of webinar-based parenting courses and seminars; ran 'Preparing your Child to return to School' sessions via WebEx.
- *"It was really good, I felt confident in helping my kids returning to school, and they were reassuring, gave good tips and strategies for talking to my kids and help them return to school and they were happy to talk to me about my worries since lockdown and how I was feeling and my relationship, you know mother and child. They were reassuring and if it was a score of 1-10, it was 10+."*
- EIS secured MOPAC money for DRIVE programme and participated in other MOPAC money bids (the Committee received an update in these and DV strategy at its last meeting).

MASH), Referral and Assessment (RAS), Emergency Duty Team (EDT) and Atlas "THE FRONT DOOR"

- Referrals have continued into the MASH and increased by over 25% - We are predicting a further increase of around of 10-15% on top of the of increase of 25% as schools open

- Good response from schools through the dedicated consultation line as schools have remained open throughout lockdown to vulnerable children and key workers.
- A dedicated line for families requiring support (not just food parcels) was established - these calls often underline more complex issues of DV and mental health.
- Despite volume, the MASH partnership has worked well to ensure that children and staff were safeguarded
- We took a proactive stance of flexible application of threshold leading to higher referral rates:
- When the restrictions started in January 20, we took a decision to continue face to face assessments and continued to make weekly contact with families
- We put in increased staffing capacity in MASH to offer additional support to schools and two extra social workers as contingency where families did not meet CSC criteria but deemed vulnerable: introduced consultation line for professionals to discuss with social worker
- Additional practitioner from the Early Help Service seconded to MASH to assist with increased volumes and to offer additional support to families and to professionals
- 92% of all assessments completed.
- Emergency Duty Team worked well - seamless transfer of information between EDT and MASH at the morning handover meeting to ensure issues picked up quickly.
- The Atlas team is now located within the MASH and contributes intelligence to daily MASH meetings
- Good take-up and timely completion of RHIs and use of information to identify and mitigate risks - 94% of looked after children who went missing were offered an RHI, with 95% acceptance rate
- All CYP who go missing from home and care or are at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation or serious youth violence are known to the Atlas team.
- MEGA (Missing Exploitation and Gangs Affiliation). Reviewed all children immediately on the MEGA list to ensure safety plans secure

Safeguarding and Care Planning

- We made conscious decisions not to immediately close CIN cases due to the pandemic to ensure that re referrals did not increase. This was welcomed by families although added to the caseloads. This increase was a ripple effect from the high volume coming through the front door.
- Our safeguarding social workers continued to visit their children through various means. Remember these are families we have known and have relationships with so virtual, on line and face to face took place. We continued to ensure that our practice standards on visiting was adhered to.
- Good timeliness - 93% of ICPCs held within 15 days of strategy discussion.
- We have 242 Children were subject to a Child Protection Plan
- These children were visited regularly in line with our practice standards – 10 days

- 100% of child protection plans reviewed within timescale
- All children on plans over 9 months are closely monitored with a new scrutiny panel which is chaired by HOS Stuart Hills.
- 88% of ICPCs result in a CP Plan. We know we have the right children.
- The Children with Disabilities Team has worked closely with SEN colleagues to determine those children with complex needs accessing specialist education prior to lockdown had access to appropriate provision or support packages during this time. CWD Group Manager attended education KIT meetings
- The Staying Together Team recruited a fourth worker during the pandemic to enable families to stay together where CYP are on the edge of care – of 102 children, only 4 came into care
- Our QA activity confirms that the weekly Legal Gateway Panel for children in PLO or entering proceedings is effective and shows good management oversight + reviews of Supervision Orders.
- We set up virtual courts to try and prevent delay to children with the backlog of court, we set up hair strand testing for substances which without the court cases would not progress
- We have 100 children in the court system at the moment – the courts have backlog

Children Looked After (CLA) and Permanency

- Moved swiftly to virtual Permanency Planning Meetings during the pandemic to ensure no delays for our children.
- We moved our fostering campaign and recruitment online and during the first recruitment drive during the first lockdown we secured 25 applications which was higher than the same campaign the year before pre Covid.
- Our fostering panel pivoted to online panels to continue to approve carers, review them and match children to long term families.
- We have continued to progress permanency planning including transition to adoption to avoid delay for children.
- 323 looked after children in Bromley – our rate is in line with London and national comparators
- All CLA regularly contacted by their social worker with regular virtual/in-person visits to ensure care plans were working – we increased contact through digital means in addition to any visits.
- Our long-term placement stability improved significantly.
- Our therapeutic service 'THRIVE' has been accessed by many foster carers and their children enabling them to understand children's behaviors and how to manage and reflect on difficult situations during this period and has led to improved stability rates.

Regional Adoption Agency (RAA):

Our RAA established in July 2019 with 8 other London LAs as '*Ambitious for Adoption CORAM Capital*' Hillingdon, Waltham Forest, Harrow, Redbridge, Barking and Dagenham and The City of London. –

- There were 12 Bromley looked after children placed with prospective adopters during the year 2019 through 2020.
- 8 children were made subject to adoption orders in 2019/20
- We continued to ensure that children and their permanency was key and during Covid we continued to match children to adopters and not only this but we ensured that placements were made one including our staff and foster carer travelling to Scotland to ensure that the introductions were not interrupted.
- We currently only have one child waiting to be placed
- No placements disrupted during 2019/20.

Children Looked After and Care Leavers

- During the lockdown we ensured activities for our children – lockdown art, cinema evenings with popcorn and evening meal/dinner delivered to children homes and have supper together, cooking classes, cultural evenings. We celebrated our care leavers achievements, Celebration of Success on 30th October 2020.
- We held an auction of the artwork on the 23rd October and raised £1500 at auction for our LinCC and Care Leaver Forum –
- Members through our chair of PDS financially contributed to our Christmas project – THANK YOU.
- Last year we celebrated our children at the Warren just before lockdown and this was the last assembly for our Virtual School Head Teacher Helen Priest who announced her retirement but remained as our first Corporate Grandparent and we have welcomed Sally Kelly to Bromley. She joined us in lockdown at the end of August and has been fantastic in supporting and getting to know our young people and staff remotely. She has continued to push their academic aspirations and our children have achieved well this year despite the issues with exams.
- We have continued, despite the fatigue, to look for innovation and grants and we have been successful in two DWP applications to support young people into work through NEET and EET and also to equip young people for work when the country opens up again.
- The Head of Service for Care Leavers has written an ETE strategy being ahead of the curve in understanding the issues that our young people will likely have as we come out of this pandemic and the impact on them
- We have refreshed our Corporate Parenting Strategy and our Portfolio Holder as Chair of the Board continues to ensure that voices of our young people are heard
- This year we refused to allow our celebration of achievement not to take place albeit differently and we have recently held this in two parts for younger and older children over two days – 24 and 26th February 2021 with over 100 children taking part in their homes on line and I know members were also present to enjoy the days. We ensured that all the children had their goody bag with awards in them and these were delivered secretly to their foster carers to open on the night to great excitement by our young people.
- Some of our young people have worked during Covid – one of our care leavers working on the front line Covid ward as a student nurse; a young man who had begun a career in hospitality and the hotel closed – he volunteered

on furlough and went back to the hospital and saw some of the doctors when he was born and a child – was given an award by his employer.

- 2 dedicated CAMHS workers for children looked after to support their mental health/wellbeing. CAMHS practitioners also joined reflective group supervision, which is well received by staff.
- We received a £39,000 grant for Wellbeing for Education Return to train and support schools and colleges to respond to the wellbeing and mental health needs of CYP as a result of Covid-19.
- We have worked hard to ensure children have suitable contact arrangements through our children's centres, facilitating a Covid-safe environment.
- All CLA are well supported by the Virtual School. Schoolwork reviewed twice weekly to ensure that both children and their carers are supported
- PEPs have continued during the pandemic - 90% of children looked after had a PEP in the summer term despite the lockdown.
- 75% of our young people are currently making expected progress at school
- Our children achieved their predicted grades at GCSE and A-level despite the challenges of lockdown and Sally Kelly presented her annual report to the last PDS
- Bromley Y, our wellbeing service, works with young people, especially our care leavers, who would not reach threshold for adult mental health services. Bromley Y accept referrals for our care leavers to 25 and offers support, mentoring and triages if there is a higher level of need.

Following the announcement on the 22nd February we have again pivoted to provide a school's hub information and letters were sent to schools to advise them of additionality of support from the 8th March for the next 3 – 6 months

- increased capacity in our MASH service and set up a dedicated consultation line for teachers – the purpose of this being that you can have discussions about any worries or concerns or wanting information as to where to signpost your parents. Qualified social workers will be able to engage with you and if it is appropriate ask you to make a referral or offer alternatives. Please do continue to use the Threshold of Need document for referrals into MASH in the usual way.
- Please remember that you have a Head of Service link for your school and I am resending the names and contacts numbers.
- Our Children Centres have pivoted throughout the pandemic offering services on line including a parenting line and this will continue to be available for parents and we have produced a parenting booklet which is a good source of information and easily distributed electronically to your parents.
- We have set up an EIS SPOC and deputy SPOC for schools in the children centre localities so that Heads, inclusion leads, and teachers know who to contact within Early Intervention Service
- BCP Parenting Helpline for families.
- Twice weekly 'drop in' line specifically for teaching staff every Tuesday and Thursday after school from 4.30 – 5.30pm. The first of these will commence on the 11th March. Children Social Care Managers, HOS, AD, Jared and I will be present to try and support and assist with any questions in relation to safeguarding or support. We will develop these with you as we go forward

and anticipate initially, they will run for 3 months with a review and opportunity for the remainder of the school year.

- Our Education Safeguarding Lead – Joan Keenan-O'Malley - is joining our morning MASH meetings to ensure that she can reach out to you in support over the next few weeks specifically in terms of giving advice.
- Bromley Y have offered a specific consultation email similar to the Trailblazer in- box but this will be dedicated for teaching staff; they will respond within 48 hours and offer advice with any anxiety or behavioural issues in supporting students back into the classroom. They are our triage through to higher levels of intervention - emotional and mental health wellbeing and this again will replicate the consultation line of CSC in advising but also being able to suggest referral routes.

In conclusion:

- We have safeguarded children
- We have supported and ensured the wellbeing of our staff
- We have continued with training for our staff
- We continued to recruit permanent staff and retain them
- We have continued to challenge ourselves in practice and performance
- We have supported families across all services
- We have ensured our children continue to fulfil their ambitions through education and destinations, work, etc.
- We have ensured that we have capacity within the system to sustain the increase in referrals to our MASH
- We have monitored closely our caseload promise and staffing capacity – it is a challenge but staff dedication and understanding in the crisis
- DV strategy launched
- Stability of placements
- Worked with our partners in the police, health and education
- Carried out review through Jim Gamble of the MASH and partners have agreed to put more into the service –

WHAT ARE OUR VULNERABILITIES GOING FORWARD?

- Recruitment and retention of permanent staff/ ability to recruit skilled staff for the posts vacant.
- Ensuring we maintain our caseload promise 12 – 15 children
- Lag in court completions – this has impact on finance being in the system but more importantly children not having care plans finalised eg. mother and baby placement – the assessment is negative court will not move the final hearing therefore delayed until June– the family will remain in assessment centre costing us 85K – but child not secured in long term stable placement
- Limited supply and increasing costs of residential placements – including the specialist placements for very complex young people – Covid pressures. The concern around any secure placement required and no availability and the cost of that placement as we know around 6K but bespoke will go up to 8 or 9K
- Increase in the Looked After Population due to Covid and families being unable to cope

- Increase in the number of referrals to MASH increased by 25%? anticipated another 10% - will this bottom out - ? staffing, caseload promise etc. that bulge moves to Early Intervention and also Safeguarding and CLA
- Increased complexity of children (SEND). v Impact of Social Work Act 2017 implementation.
- Long term closure of short breaks throughout 2020 resulting in demand and cost pressures

Next steps

What to retain

- Working in a more digital flexible world for meetings has had benefits – our GP/POLICE colleagues have joined in conferences – they have experienced difficulties in the past to physically attend. – new way of working has enhanced this for us and for them
- Strategy meetings particularly for police colleagues who work a shift schedule can now phone in and participate more easily and information is more live.
- Meetings are more focussed; social workers need to be in the office less when writing reports and case notes and this means they can visit in a more concentrated way and write up.
- Some core group meetings are more beneficial over a digital platform – they can be held in other venues rather than at the Civic/schools – it also means when rooms are premium, we do not have to delay meetings.
- More frequent visits in between visits to our young people and care leavers – this means that the visit is not always specific but just keeping in touch and picking up information and part of the relationship model and as a corporate parent
- Training online means more of a take up – people not physically having to work around visits etc.

What Will Not Change

- We are very social animals in the social work field and face to face visits to families is crucial – there is a sense and tangible feeling about what life is like for a child when you are in their home – this must never change.
- Conferences for families being in the room and feeling the support of professionals but also the challenge to make changes for children.
- Being in a family and meeting a child face to face – watching the minutia of their ticks and face changes in an instant – who is in the room with a child – are they able to be free with their comments and views – a sense of what is this child's experience – would this be good enough for my child?
- DV is crucial to be with a victim and understand and feel the issues.
- Mental health and wellbeing – again critical that we can sense the individual
- Being able to hug our children appropriately.
- Courts re opening to face to face – enabling families to have the opportunity of seeing the professionals albeit painful sometimes – having their day physically in court is very important in their story about fighting for their child.