



GENERAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SCST SERVICES

Meeting	Education and Childrens Services Scrutiny Panel
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1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Education and Childrens Services Scrutiny with a summary overview of the impact Covid-19 has had on the Slough Children's Services Trust and the services provided to children and families in Slough to date.

2. Executive summary

- 2.1 The impacts of Covid-19 have been managed well in the immediate business continuity arrangements. This report will provide details on the following areas:
- Legislative duties and business as usual
 - Health and safety
 - Workforce capacity and wellbeing
 - Finances
 - Demand for services
 - Impact upon children and families

3. Briefing

3.1 Legislative duties and business as usual

- 3.1.1 Despite the Covid-19 pandemic locking down parts of normal life and routine activity in other sectors, the delivery of statutory services does not fall under these arrangements and we fall under the category of civil emergencies arrangements. In addition, the legal framework regarding duties and activities to children in need of a statutory service continues to apply.
- 3.1.2 Therefore, the Trust has continued to operate a business as usual service and we have not closed down any parts of our services as a result. In doing so we have adapted to the changing advice and guidance provided by the DfE and Public Health England in carrying out our duties and responsibilities under the legislation. In certain functions the DfE introduced easements in our duties and processes which fall mainly under regulatory services such as residential care, adoption and fostering. The Trust has not used any of these easements to date.
- 3.1.3 We have managed the competing duties in legislation between the need to carry out statutory duties with responsibilities under health and safety and requirements to mitigate against transmission of the disease.



The application of our service delivery and responsibilities toward the workforce and community have been underpinned by legal advice and guidance issued through both child care legislation and health and safety executive legislation.

- 3.1.4 The application of the business continuity arrangements have worked, although the pace of change, adaptation and new reporting functions has created considerable additional tasks for the workforce over and above normal activity. This has inevitably stretched capacity in the service.

3.2 Health and safety

- 3.2.1 The Trust sourced independent legal advice regarding the legal responsibilities in relation to Covid-19 and our statutory responsibilities to children, young people and families. The advice has been implemented.

- 3.2.2 A risk assessment for the Trust has been produced and reviewed by both the Employee Engagement Group and the Union. A separate risk assessment has been produced for Breakaway.

- 3.2.3 Other actions have been taken to ensure appropriate measures are taken to reduce the potential spread of the virus –

- Marking off usage of every other desk to ensure social distancing;
- Working rotas to monitor the number of staff in the building at any point;
- Hand sanitising stations placed at entry and exit points;
- Additional cleaning of communal areas;
- Regular communication to staff re Public Health and national guidance;
- PPE has been made available to all staff who are conducting visits;
- Additional equipment has been sourced and distributed to support home working;
- Amended working patterns have been made available to staff with childcare responsibilities;
- A visiting protocol has been produced to advise staff on how to manage safe visits
- A risk assessment has been built into ICS to prompt staff to ask appropriate questions as to how to approach visits;
- DSE risk assessments have been issued to all staff who are home working. Appropriate equipment is being sourced on an individual basis, dependant on the outcome of the risk assessments.

3.3 Workforce capacity and wellbeing

- 3.3.1 The table below illustrates the known numbers to date of Trust staff shielding, self-isolating and testing;

Number of cases of symptoms reported (leading to self isolating/sick)	54
Number of individuals reporting symptoms	50
Number of working days lost	157
Number of individuals shielding – themselves or other	38

Staff have been supported to take appropriate action in terms of their own / their families'



health. Some employees have been shielding as a result of their own underlying issues, others as a result of living with an individual who is shielding.

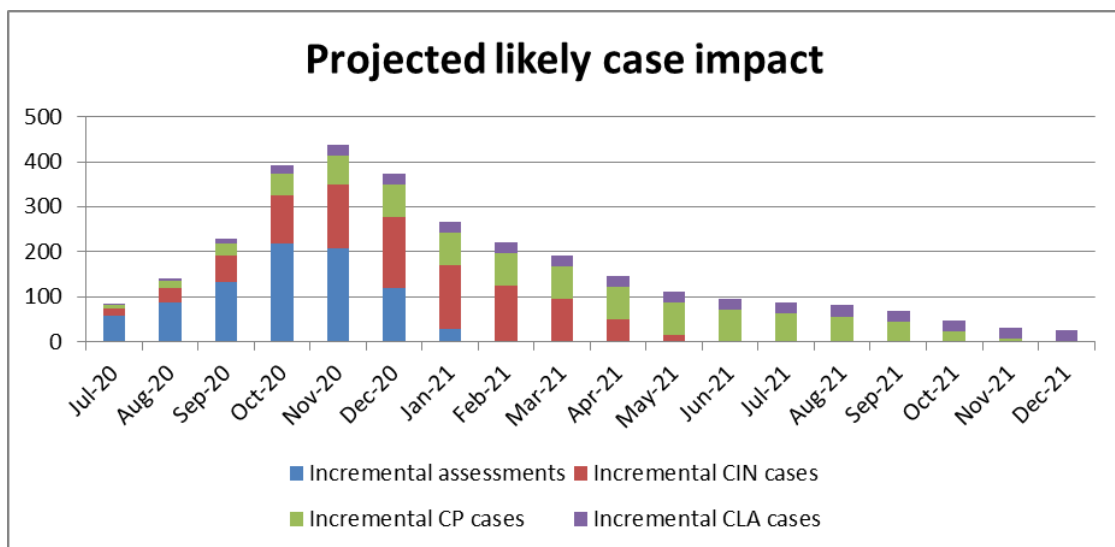
- 3.2.2 Working patterns and approach to work have been altered to support those individuals who have childcare issues; these have been dealt with on an individual basis.
- 3.3.3 Occupational Health has been approached for advice as to how to manage employees who are shielding back to work. This will be undertaken on an individual basis.
- 3.3.4 Staff have been encouraged to share their concerns, feedback and views regarding Covid-19 via a generic Covid-19 email address created. Issues have been responded to on an individual basis. The Employee Engagement Group has specifically discussed Covid-19 and the approach the Trust has taken to date, with remedial action being taken where issues have been raised. Managers have been encouraged to communicate with their staff on a regular basis and to discuss any concerns that employees may have to provide reassurance etc.

3.4 Finances

- 3.4.1 The Trust has incurred £219k of Covid-19 related costs to the end of June. £130k of this relates to incremental residential costs, of which £96k relating to two young people. The first requiring 1:1 supervision 24/7 for consistently breaching Government guidance on social distancing putting himself and others at risk. The second awaiting sentencing, having been found guilty of murder, delayed due to the closure of the courts. While he remains in remand until sentencing is passed, he is the responsibility of the Trust.
- 3.4.2 A further £44k has been incurred on care leavers, continuing support for their accommodation in line with the secretary of states request. Other costs include legal advice on meeting health and safety duties, PPE, teleconferencing costs.
- 3.4.3 Although the Trust has not seen any incremental costs from staffing as yet, with a number of staff shielding and self isolating, there is a backlog of work building. This will have an impact on the cost base of the Trust, both directly and indirectly. The result has led to increasing caseloads and pressures on staff. Staff turnover remains an issue with feedback on exit interviews referring to caseloads as being a factor in some cases.
- 3.4.4 The bigger impact is still expected to come, with schools returning in September. There has been a 23% reduction in the number of contacts made to the Trust since lockdown. Our expectation the backlog of contacts will filter through in September and October when schools return. This only accounts for a lag in contacts and does not take into account the effect Covid-19 is having on families. There are already signs of increasing mental health issues being presented, an increase in referrals with domestic abuse as a key factor, our expectation is for this to continue with the possibility of the position worsening when furloughed support ends and families become more destitute.
- 3.4.5 With lockdown, there have been limitations in the provision of community services to families, these families are now presenting to social care with escalating and more complex needs.



- 3.4.6 Conversions of contacts into referrals into social care have increased from standard rates of 25% to 30% during May and June. This is a concerning statistic and if this continues will have a significant impact on the financials as more children and young people are open to social care.
- 3.4.7 It is difficult to predict with any certainty the financial impact. Initially the Trust used the LGA / Kent analytics model, but more recent work within the South East Local Authorities on data prediction indicates the LGA analytics model does not take into account other wider factors and variables. The Trust has developed its own analysis which takes into account the lag in contacts seen to date along with the increase in referral rates. The table below shows the expected impact from Covid-19 on demands for services over the coming months:



The figures need to be taken cautiously because they could change with any forthcoming legislation as the Covid-19 pandemic continues. They will be dependent upon changes in demand, although we are certain these are likely to be higher than current demand. September through to December is always a high demand time for all Local Authorities as demand follows a relatively consistent cyclical pattern. What is not so easily predictable is how high that demand will be.

Based on the above trajectory of caseloads, this could have a £1.2m impact on the finances over and above the costs incurred to date.

- 3.7.8 The Trust has been able to manage demands to date with sufficient commissioned placement provision in the market, but if the above cases materialise, and assuming other authorities are in similar positions, there will be significant demands on placements, the ability to find suitable provision to match the needs will be diminished, there is also the risk costs could escalate as demands outstrip supply.

The Trust is looking to present options to the Council on how this can be mitigated, which will include block booking of provision in advance.



3.5 Demand for services

- 3.5.1 Whilst we have seen a reduction in the number of contacts to the Trust since the start of the lockdown, the volume of those progressing to a referral has increased significantly. More recently the number of contacts has risen as we would expect as partnership services begin to resume.
- 3.5.2 The number of children subject to a child protection plan has been rising month on month. Section 47's undertaken in June are at levels seen in January 2020, the number leading to an ICPC are also at the same levels seen pre Covid-19. Slough has 77.5 children per 10,000 that are subject to a child protection plan which places us in the top quartile of authorities for this indicator.
- 3.5.3 As July progresses we expect to see levels of demand increase to pre Covid-19 levels. Above levels are anticipated as Health, Education, Youth Services and Voluntary sectors resume direct engagement with children and young people.
- 3.5.4 Colleagues within the South East are seeing an increase in the number of children becoming looked after as well as an increase in the complexity of issues, additionally teenage girls self-harming and the impact for children under two as a result of physical and domestic abuse has seen an increase in child deaths and serious harm.
- 3.5.5 Regionally the numbers of families being referred to social care who have not been previously known has also increased; this is also the case for Slough.
- 3.5.6 The increase of poverty on families as a consequence of the changes in economy is likely to further increase demand on services as these familial stressors impact on children.

3.6 Impact upon children and families

- 3.6.1 The Trust has continued with business as usual services including face to face visiting to children and families within their home environment. These visits have been within statutory timescales. Where a child or family member has been shielding or has reported symptoms and is self isolating we have undertaken a 'virtual visit' often through Facetime on iPads.

In circumstances where there is shielding, we have undertaken door-step garden visits with use of PPE. Direct work has been undertaken with children and young people via virtual means and children have reported this as supportive and beneficial. The vast majority of visiting continues to be community based and face to face in the home, with children being seen and where appropriate seen alone.

Between the 23 March 2020 and 29 June 2020, Trust social workers have completed the following visiting:

	Face to face	Virtual	Total visits		



Total	2348	490	2838	82.7%	17.3%
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We have seen changes and complexity of both contact and referrals, domestic abuse (487% increase on the same period last year); substance use (166% increase) and mental health (229% increase) are all significantly higher when compared to the levels in the same period in previous years.

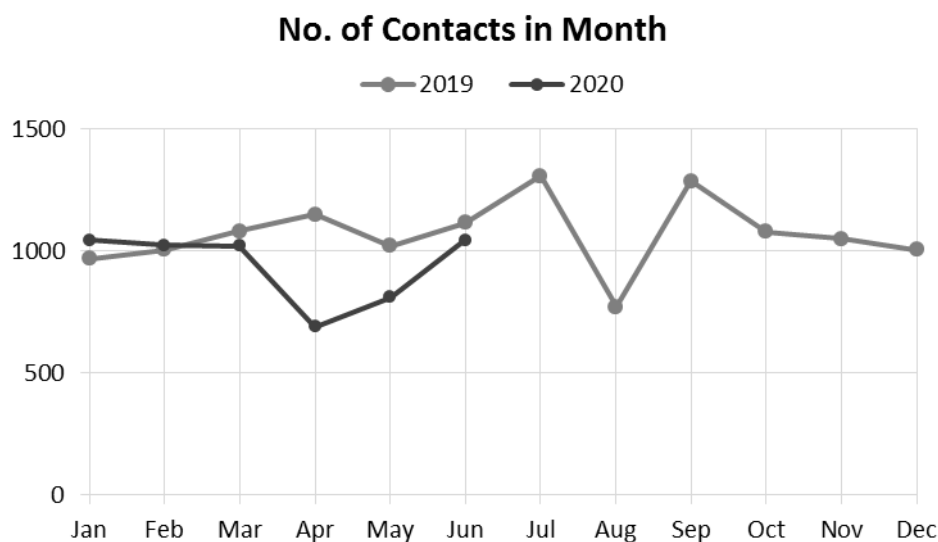
- 3.6.2 There has been a reduction in performance on children looked after with up-to-date health checks (75.6%) – 7% below the same time last year.
- 3.6.3 The Trust continued to visit children during the period of lockdown whilst changes to visiting frequency changed we are now return to a business as usual approach. Face to face and virtual work has featured and the impact for children has varied, for some older children they have engaged more fully in virtual contact.
- 3.6.4 We are seeing an impact upon children missing followed by an upswing in exploitation as regionally and locally there has been an increase in the numbers of children being exploited as well as these children being of younger age.
- 3.6.5 There has also been an increase in the number of newly looked after children (became children looked after in the last 12 months) that have been placed more that 20 miles away from home, availability of placements for children with complex needs has been compromised as providers have not accepted admissions or been concerned at the ability to manage the risks associated with children not adhering to the lockdown conditions imposed.
- 3.6.6 Remote courts, delays in multi professional information such as independent court reports, quality of information from professionals due to their ‘suspended’ services have all impacted on timescales and quality of information.
- 3.6.7 DBS checks for prospective carers and assessments has hampered the process of recruiting foster carers, we currently have 39 carers and 8 at stage 2 of the process.
- 3.6.8 Number of vulnerable children attending school has been low and the Trust continues to encourage parents to send their children to school. As schools resume a full curriculum in September we are expecting to see a ‘spike’ in referrals from education providers.
- 3.6.9 Completion of PEPs for CLA being held within timescales has been impacted by the lockdown period, with performance at 82% - performance is generally 90%+.
- 3.6.10 Laptop distribution for children following the receipt of over 300 laptops has been well received and these have been distributed to schools that have been able to configure these enabling vulnerable children to access education.
- 3.6.11 Children in care and care leavers consultations have taken place in relation to the impact of Covid- 19.
- 3.6.12 There has been a reduction in the % of care leavers (19-21) in education, employment or



training. Reducing 6% in the last 3 months from 59.5% (April 2020) to 53.7% (June 2020) Breakaway remains active with precautions and individualised risk assessments in place, the process of registration for the adjacent property to allow for the refurbishment has been impacted and we are still awaiting a date for the inspection visit to enable the move.

3.7 Contact and referral information

3.7.1 The start of this calendar year (2020) saw contacts received at similar levels to the previous year 2019. However following the national lockdown and closure of schools towards the end of March 2020, there has been a substantial decrease in the number of contacts received by the Trust. Between April and June there was a 22.6% reduction in contacts received in 2020 compared to 2019.

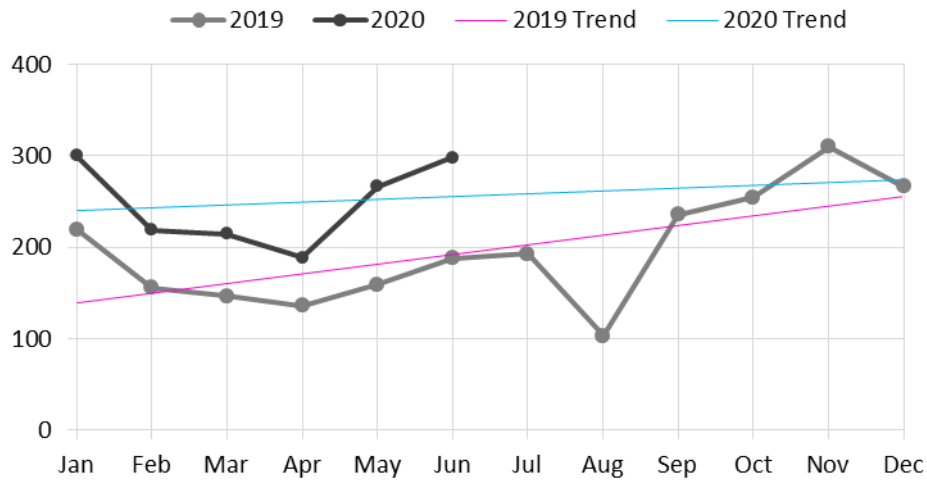


Despite the reduction in the number of contacts received, the % of contacts progressing to referral this calendar year has remained above 20%, this is reflective of performance between October 2019 and February 2020 when the Trust experienced a high level of activity.

3.7.2 The number of referrals in month has also been higher this calendar year than the previous. Between January and June the Trust has seen a 48% increase in referrals in 2020 compared to 2019. The trajectory as a result of the first six months of 2020, suggests similar if not higher levels of referrals are likely later in the year as schools reopen following the summer holidays.

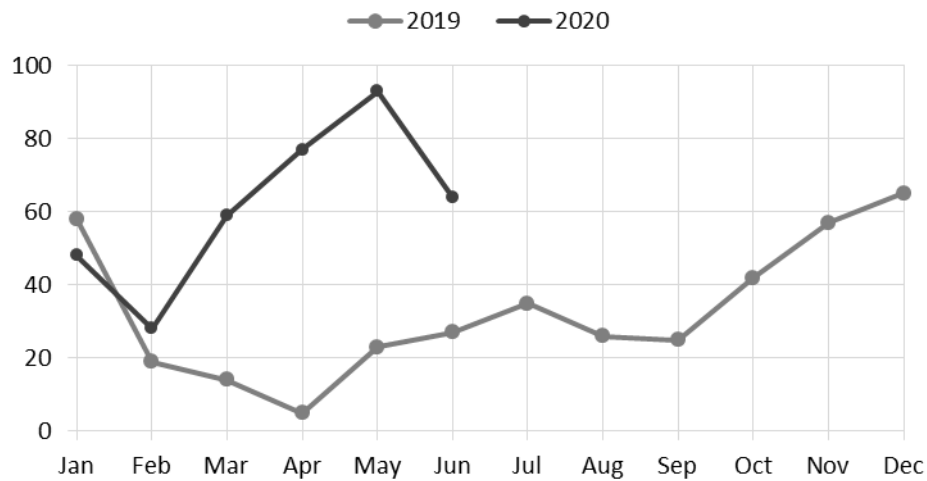


No. of Referrals in Month



3.7.3 During the lockdown period a significant number of referrals have involved domestic abuse, between April and June this represents a 325% increase in 2020 compared to 2019.

No. of Referrals in Month involving Domestic Abuse



3.7.4 Similarly there have been increases in the number of referrals that have involved mental health and substance misuse related issues during the lock down period compared to the previous year. There has been a 265% increase in referrals in involving mental health, whilst there has been 181% increase in substance abuse.

	Referrals in Month involving					
	Domestic Abuse		Mental Health		Substance Misuse	
Month	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
Jan	58	48	7	7	9	22
Feb	19	28	5	12	2	16



Mar	14	59	7	25	4	13
Apr	5	77	6	20	8	33
May	23	93	7	17	7	17
Jun	27	64	7	36	12	26
Jul	35		7		11	
Aug	26		10		8	
Sep	25		24		4	
Oct	42		23		7	
Nov	57		23		11	
Dec	65		12		19	
Jan-Jun	146	369	39	117	42	127
Jan-Jun % Change		153%		200%		202%
Apr-Jun	55	234	20	73	27	76
Apr-Jun % Change		325%		265%		181%

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 The Trust recommends that the Education and Childrens Services Scrutiny Panel note the impacts of Covid-19 on the Trust and services to children and families in Slough and note the activity in the Trust continuing to deliver business as usual.