

30 March 2020

Frequently asked Questions – Children’s Services

1. I would like to seek reassurance from you as a LA, as to what you will do specifically to support residential providers alongside the basic government guidance. We work with young people who may struggle to adhere to boundaries for such a serious health risk and we need to devise action plans with LA’s to address individual concerns that may arise which need to be agreed in conjunction with yourselves, adapting risk assessments for individual young people.”

Answer

Providers would discuss concerns about an individual young person’s risk and support needs with their social worker or personal advisor. Any general concerns or questions about Covid-19 should be directed to the Families and Children commissioning service.

Wiltshire Council will be working in partnership with providers, in the best interests of children, and will discuss individual cases as necessary.

2. “what would be helpful is if the Local Authorities we work with share their contingency and continuity plans for in house fostering services as this will be more relevant than the ‘standard’ guidance for us to be able to consider and ensuring a collaborative approach. “

Answer

Yes, our Director of Families and Children’s Services has agreed to share our BCP for the Wiltshire Council Fostering service soon under separate cover. This is an evolving and changing situation and we are continually reviewing our own BCP’s regularly to reflect this.

Some actions that we are taking include:

- Review our children in care to identify the highest risk children
- Reviewing Carers potentially vulnerable or at risk if they contract the virus
- Review carers support networks
- Identify additional support package for Wiltshire Council foster carers dependant on priorities from other reviews

3. Can I ask you supply reassurance around the following in the instances of a pandemic?
 - That there will be clear lines of communication with the Corporate Parent when required
 - Finance function and paying of invoices will continue to operate in a timely manner.

Answer

We are ensuring communication is maintained throughout this epidemic, for all areas of the Council operations, including our duties as Corporate Parent, and in our finance teams.

Each business area in Wiltshire Council is updateing and maintaining their own BCP to ensure continuity of service, considering any developments.

4. Are you able to offer us any advice from the Local Authority in relation to staff shortages, and how to cover these?

Answer

Each organisation will have its own BCP, to ensure they are able to staff any provision. There is expected to be guidance from central government which could include information in relation to minimum staffing levels.

We would currently discuss what support was available with providers individually if this was needed.

Providers have considered the following:

- Bank Staff contacted in advance.
- Agencies contacted.
- Manager, Directors and responsible individuals ready to work from alternative sites.
- Considered what minimum core staffing levels are needed for essential duties.
- List of staff with and without dependent children/adults.
- Identifying and maintaining a pool of workers for key tasks.

5. Outside of the BCP, we have been running through models of operating with up to a 20% staff absence (as per current predictions). At this level of absence, we can implement contingencies that mean that we should cope and maintain operations. However, beyond that figure we will begin to struggle to operate normally.

Answer

Staffing query as above.

6. Please provide advice on actions that Wilts LA will take in the event a single young person in placement contracts coronavirus in a house where other young persons are placed? Will Wilts look to remove the other Young people?

I attach a grid of scenarios below. We would be grateful if you would use the call to provide guidance on managing these scenarios. We have indicated our preferred position in each case and we would like to understand Wilts position in each instance and whether the positions would differ.

Individual Case	Proposed Response from Provider
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Residential Care Home resident diagnosed	YP remains placed in the home. Follow medical advice on treatment. Placement continues.
Pupil at school diagnosed	Pupil required to be quarantined at home as per medical advice.
Foster Child diagnosed	Foster child remains in placement. All carers to be given training on treatment, impact and expectations ASAP
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One or more other residents diagnosed	Unless specific medical advice directs otherwise, all placements to continue. All reasonable attempts to minimise contact between affected and unaffected residents. Individual homes to develop action plans to manage such circumstances in the least stressful manner possible.
Pupils at school where other pupil has been diagnosed	Government advice to be followed to consider the closing of the school.
Foster child where carer or other child in home has been diagnosed	Foster child to remain in placement. All reasonable attempts to minimise contact between affected and unaffected individuals in the home.
Staff members who are working in home where resident has been diagnosed	H.R. / Legal Advice to be taken on company approach to whether staff will be expected to continue to attend work or to work with a resident who has been diagnosed. Immediate strategy to be developed to manage 30% reduction in staffing capacity either through illness, caring requirements or refusal to expose themselves to contaminated environment.
Building / home which has had multiple diagnoses	Advice to be sought on whether, when and how any environment may need to be decontaminated. If required process for this event to be established.

Answer

In principle we do not have any objection to the proposals set out by the provider above, but each individual case would need to be discussed, and this would need to be reviewed considering any guidance from the government.

We do not want to be considering the moving of young people from their homes as a result of them, or other children in placement contracting the Corona Virus, unless this would put a child at risk due to any existing medical conditions. Any such case must be discussed with the relevant Wiltshire Council worker before any decision is made.

7. Can a child be moved from their own room to accommodate a child with the Corona Virus, in order for the child to be able to self-isolate

Answer

We do not expect any children to be moved from their current placement, as this is where they call home, and we do not want any additional uncertainty for our them.

From Conference Call 23rd March 2020

8. If a property has 4 rooms with one bathroom/toilet and one en-suite room and there is one YP who needs isolating or has the virus, to save them using the same bathroom as the other people we would consider a room swap on a temporary basis ensuring the room we swap to has been deep cleaned and that they could swap back. This would be discussed with social worker/PA is this acceptable.

Answer

We would not expect a young person to have to move out of their home to accommodate another young person in this instance. An individual conversation with the social worker / key worker would be required.

9. If one YP from a house/flat of 2 has the virus on discussion with Social worker/PA as a temporary measure, we would feel it safer for the YP to be moved to another Flat on the same site – how does this sit with the authority. It would be made clear to the YP this was a temporary measure at an extraordinary time

Answer

This would be another individual conversation with the social worker / key worker.

10. In ref 38-week residential placement. If parents/carers are unwell with symptoms at the point the young person would be going home, what would be the plan be? Likewise, what would the plan be if the young person were isolating due to symptoms?

Answer

We would support a decision for the child to remain at the residential setting if family were unwell, to prevent any further infections and to keep the child safe. There would obviously need to be a conversation with the family and the social worker / key worker.

From conference call 30th March 2020

11. I recognise it was perhaps an extreme situation, but we do want to be prepared for future eventualities. This was not a case involving Wiltshire children.

One caring family with little support of their own have two small children in placement.

One of the carers was diagnosed with the Virus and was hospitalised. During the day time the partner started to show symptoms. A possible alternative placement was identified.

At 10.00pm the other partners situation worsened, and we were concerned that she would also be hospitalised.

The identified alternate carers then decided that they didn't want to take the risk.

We searched amongst four teams but were not able to identify any other carers with space that were willing to take the children who were deemed to be higher than normal risk.

Fortunately, the carers health settled, and a place was not required. However, along with all other approving bodies we do have a significant number of single carers and it is possible that it might happen to one of them.

We are now compiling a list of all carers across the agency that would be able and willing to take a child in such an emergency.

My questions though are as follows

If such an event happens again and we genuinely cannot find an alternative placement how will Wiltshire work with us to find a solution on the day/night?

Answer

Of course, we would work with our providers, but the same issue could apply to Wiltshire Council – we may not have a placement either. I suggest that your Business Continuity Plan reflects this challenge and you have contingency in place to support to these more isolated carers. You may want to consider buddying them up now so that, as far as possible, they have another carer ready to step in.

If we do identify carers willing to take the children but who already have other children in placement should we seek agreement of the existing children's placing authority because we will be adding children at higher risk to the household with their children? Getting agreement on the night if it is out of hours would be very difficult anyway.

Answer

This would need to be risk assessed on an individual child basis. We would expect other local authorities to be informed as usual practice, and I am sure we would all would want to be assured that there was a risk assessment and to see a copy of it before making a decision.

I hope this doesn't sound impolite, but would Wiltshire feel differently depending on whether it was their children in the emergency or it was their children in the existing placement?

Answer

Wiltshire would not behave any differently regardless of where the children were from. It would all be dependent on the risk assessment

12. Ref enquiry about Payments and invoices, ensure your payment departments are able to operate in a timely fashion through the crisis.

If your payment departments cannot so operate, we need you to pay us in advance and/or pay a fixed agreed sum, at no less than 100% of typical invoice value, to be trued up if necessary when the crisis subsides.

Answer

Our Accounts Payable team are currently processing all electronic invoices without delay and are continuing to support providers to ensure payments are made as quickly as possible. This will be reviewed on a regular basis, and we will respond accordingly to support cash flow to providers. (See separate communication)

13. Immediately start to pay for our service for the duration of this crisis in advance, based on the previous month's fees.

This will help provide certainty in our cashflow and will also prevent unnecessary time and delay in administrative bureaucracy when all our efforts need to be focused on enabling and supporting front line care delivery.

Answer

Payments will be processed as normal for now. This will be reviewed on a regular basis, and we will respond accordingly to support cash flow to providers. (See separate communication).

14. Immediately pay the outstanding invoices we have already issued.

Answer

Should be happening already – Please inform us if this is not happening

Copy of email sent to all providers 30th March 2020 regarding invoices :

Dear Providers

We have received a number of enquiries at Wiltshire Council in regard to the prompt payment of invoices during the Covid 19 epidemic. We would like to reassure you all that our accounts payable team is up to date with any electronic invoices that have been received, and they are ensuring that prompt payment is being made. As you will understand, many of our staff are working from home at this time, and this means that we have a corporate challenge to address any post that is being sent to

the Council offices. Some buildings are not being used, and others have only a skeleton staff.

In light of this situation, please can you make sure that you are sending electronic invoices to the following address (BSAccountspayable@wiltshire.gov.uk), with their relevant purchase order, and we will make sure that these are processed without delay. We are also in the process of amending your provider details on our system, to allow immediate payment terms instead of the normal 28 or 30 day terms, in order to support your cash flow. We have also instructed our teams across social care and education, to forward any invoices in relation to Covid 19 as a priority to our accounts payable team, who will make sure these are dealt with quickly, and again support providers with their cashflow at this challenging time. Separate advice will be sent out regarding a process for any additional Covid 19 related costs, but please be assured that we are here to support you, and enable you to continue to care for our vulnerable families, children and adults.

We would like to also take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support , and we look forward to strengthening our partnerships into the future.

Please let me know if you have any queries related to this matter.

Kind regards

*Helen Jones, Director of Commissioning
Payable Manager*

John R Rogers, Accounts

Communication with the local authority should be directed as follows:

- 1. Any child specific communication must be with the responsible worker in Wiltshire Council**
- 2. Any generic questions or information must be sent to the Families and Children's Commissioning Team**
CandF.Commissioning@wiltshire.gov.uk
- 3. The number to call for generic coronavirus related questions is 01225 718 777.**

Good practice taken from providers BCP:

- Signage ref hand washing displayed. Hold practical demonstrations.
- Not shaking hands and feeling ok and confident about this. Some providers have made this policy currently?
- Updated visitor's policy.
- Updated cleaning schedules with specific attention to door handles and commonly used surfaces/areas e.g. TV remotes.
- Team meetings suspended or held virtually.
- Updated colleague contact lists and External contact list.
- Making contact with the local supermarket and discussing needs and gaining priority.

- Flexible working arrangements. Those who usually can't work weekends/days/evening are looking at working alternative shifts as children are now home in the day.

The most recent government guidance on vulnerable children and young people can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>

We will organise a further conference call for Monday 30th March 2020 at 1pm, and a further appointment will be sent to you under separate cover.

Please forward any questions by 5pm on Friday 27th March to CandF.Commissioning@wiltshire.gov.uk

Thank you for your continued support.

6 April 2020

Frequently asked Questions – Children's Services

15. I would like to seek reassurance from you as a LA, as to what you will do specifically to support residential providers alongside the basic government guidance. We work with young people who may struggle to adhere to boundaries for such a serious health risk and we need to devise action plans with LA's to address individual concerns that may arise which need to be agreed in conjunction with yourselves, adapting risk assessments for individual young people."

Answer

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16. "what would be helpful is if the Local Authorities we work with share their contingency and continuity plans for in house fostering services as this will be more relevant than the 'standard' guidance for us to be able to consider and ensuring a collaborative approach. "

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From conference call 30th March 2020

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Answer

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Please let me know if you have any queries related to this matter.

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Payable Manager*

John R Rogers, Accounts

29. We have received several questions regarding the view of the Council on statutory visits and contact with families to understand what is expected of providers.

Answer

New guidance has just been released for the Department for Education (DfE), dated 3rd April 2020, and titled 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for local authorities on children's social care'.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care>

This should help to answer your questions related to this subject, and Wiltshire Council will be happy to discuss any information related to individual children.

Our position is simply that visits can and should go ahead where required and subject to risk assessment. Equally though alternative methods can also be deployed; again subject to individual assessment. Essentially decisions will be made on a case by case basis but we do want to maintain face to face contact where we can.

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