

**For general release**

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee</b> <b>Date: 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Update report Early Help and Children's Social Care</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Nick Pendry Director Early Help &amp; Children's Social Care</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	<b>Cllr Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning</b>
<b>PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:</b>	<b>Nick Pendry Director Early Help &amp; Children's Social Care</b>

**CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/ AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON**

To offer a clear commitment to children in care and our young adults leaving care is fully aligned to our Corporate Plan for Croydon (2018-2022) in the following areas

- Our children and young people thrive and reach their full potential
- Everyone feels safer in their street, neighbourhood and home
- Everyone has the opportunity to work and build their career.

[Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022](#)

<b>ORIGIN OF ITEM:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This item is contained in the Sub-Committee's work programme.</li></ul>
<b>BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:</b>	To provide reassurance regarding the most vulnerable children and what support is in place for them as we emerge from lockdown.

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 This report provides an update on early help and children's social care as the Covid-19 lockdown is lifted and children return to schools. The report includes issues to inform the sub-committee's work programme for the coming year and provides assurance that improvement will be sustained despite the impact of covid-19 and the staffing review proposals.

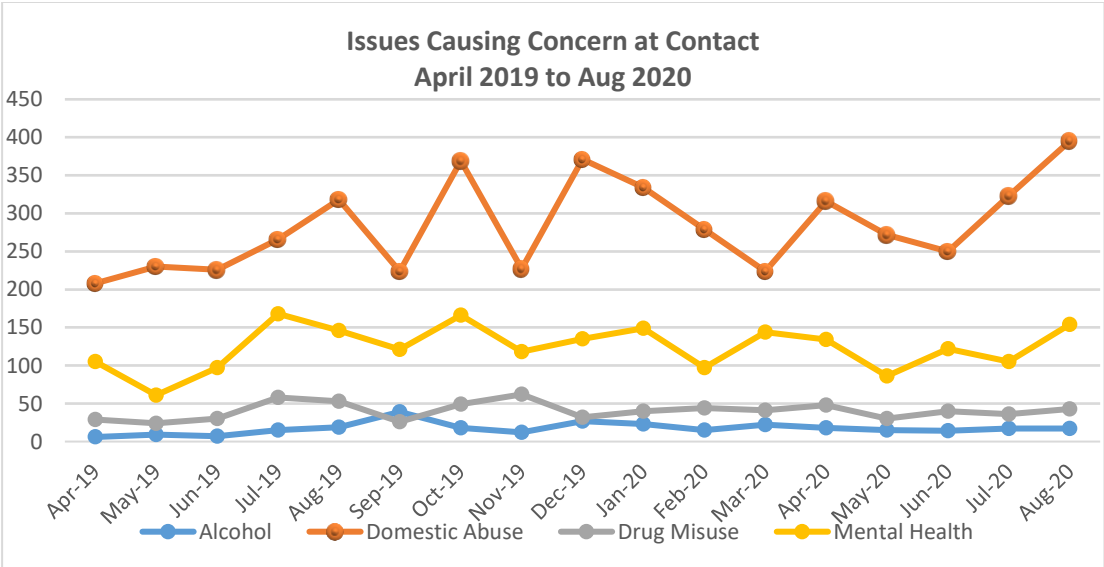
**2 Service trends**

- 2.1 As reported to the sub-committee in June 2020, contacts to the SPOC at the front door to children’s services had reduced over December 2019 – May 2020. This pattern was repeated nationwide, driven in the main by the significantly reduced numbers of children in school, which are the major source of contacts and referrals to children’s social care.
- 2.2 Over June and July contacts have begun to rise, although not yet to pre-Covid levels. Whilst the lockdown has been eased for most social activities schools have only reopened in the past week. The service is therefore anticipating a spike in contacts that become referrals requiring assessment in the coming weeks, as more children come into contact with staff in schools.

Additional parental needs

- 2.3 The SPOC closely monitors the main issues causing concern in contacts from partners such as schools, hospitals, the police and members of the public. The issues are tracked through into contacts that become referrals, and referrals that lead to child and family assessments.
- 2.4 Table 1 below tracks the issues of concern for parents in contacts to SPOC since April 2019. As can be seen, mental health issues and domestic abuse are the most prevalent across the four parental issues of concern.
- 2.5 Over January – June 2020 although there were monthly fluctuations the overall trend was downwards for these issues.
- 2.6 More recently there has been an uplift in these two areas, particularly where domestic abuse is a concern. The service is preparing for a further increase as the total number of contacts rise.

Table 1



- 2.7 Specialist staff with expertise in adult mental health and substance misuse as well as domestic abuse provide case consultations to social workers, to ensure assessments and safeguarding interventions are informed by consideration of adults' needs whilst keeping children at the centre.
- 2.8 All staff in early help and children's social care are required to attend mandatory training on domestic abuse awareness and risk identification which is delivered by the Children's Safeguarding Partnership in collaboration with the Family Justice Centre. A specialist Domestic Abuse senior practitioner has a programme of training starting in October 2020 focused on applying the learning from recent serious case reviews to daily practice.
- 2.9 As lockdown restrictions have eased social workers are returning to face to face visits with children and families in accordance with the service standards for children in need, children on child protection plans and children in care and care leavers. Weekly performance reporting is being closely monitored by Heads of Service to ensure children and families are being appropriately supported

### Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

- 2.10 As previously reported the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children coming into care reduced over the lockdown months, as can be seen in table 2. This has been the picture across the 'port of entry' boroughs with the dramatic reduction in road and train traffic. The number increased in August, and members will be aware of the rapid increase in children arriving by boat on the south coast. The service has maintained pre-lockdown capacity in anticipation of an uplift, and are liaising closely with other local authorities in the region, the LGA and the Home Office 2020 to inform preparations.

Table 2

2020	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	August
New entrants	7	7	2	3	3	2	6

## **3. Sustaining service improvements**

- 3.1 Actions to ensure the substantial service improvements noted in the Ofsted 'good' judgement are sustained are set out in the Children's continuous improvement plan 2020-22, the draft of which was reviewed by the sub-committee in June.
- 3.2 The cycle of meetings set out in the quality assurance framework have continued throughout the Covid-19 period. Chaired by the Director Early Help and Children's Social Care these are:
- Monthly service check and challenge meeting to review service development and innovation plans and agree actions as required to meet children's services ambitions. These plans underpin the continuous improvement plan with operational details
  - A monthly Practice Improvement and Innovation Board to provide assurance that Children's Services are high performing by scrutinising the performance, quality, and effectiveness of services

- On a quarterly basis service managers join the practice innovation board, to ensure middle managers are directly engaged in performance scrutiny and service innovation

3.4 Heads of service are continuing to drive the actions in their service improvement plans, working through their management teams.

3.5 The resource plan for early help and children’s social care sets out the basis for the proposals in the staffing review. In particular, the transformation programme in 2019/20 has resulted in a sustained reduction in volume and activity in children’s social care compared to March 2018. As the ILACS inspection noted the practice model is being embedded, the grip and oversight of services is more robust and the quality of practice has improved. The staffing review proposals reflect this reduction in activity and the translation of the transformation priorities into business as usual.

#### 4. SWOT analysis

4.1 Table 3 shows the SWOT analysis to inform the development of the sub-committee’s work programme.

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embedding systemic practice model</li> <li>• Successful bid for social workers in schools</li> <li>• Increasingly stable staff group; agency target of below 25% achievable this autumn</li> <li>• Stable, committed leadership and management cohort</li> <li>• Comprehensive learning and development offer targeting the service improvement priorities launched September 2020</li> <li>• Weekly readiness task group to prepare for Ofsted focused visit</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unknown longer-term impact of Covid-19 on family breakdown and risks to children</li> <li>• Increased senior management portfolios</li> <li>• Staff transition to post-Covid remote workstyles</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a family therapy academy as a centre of excellence for the sector</li> <li>• Training partner agencies in systemic practice</li> <li>• Stronger shared understanding of safeguarding through collaboration with schools</li> <li>• Transformation of SPOC to further develop systemic approach through professional conversations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused visit from Ofsted in the autumn</li> <li>• Uncertainty around senior leadership impacts on staff morale and retention</li> <li>• Further financial challenges</li> <li>• Rapid spike in demand that services cannot accommodate</li> <li>• Continued complexity of child protection work in Croydon</li> <li>• Reduced project support impacts on pace against ILACS recommendations and service development</li> </ul>

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**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:** None

**APPENDICE:** None