

1 December 2021		ITEM: 8
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Impact of Covid-19 on Education and Children's Social Care		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: No	
Report of: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director, Education & Skills Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Education & Skills & Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director for Children's Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

At the July Committee a joint report was presented from both Education and Social Care around the impact the coronavirus (COVID-19) has had on our children and young people. The committee requested a further update for the December meeting to outline what Children's Services were doing to show the recovery plans in place to support children and young people. This report will outline what schools have been providing to ensure children and young people get a good educational offer and the support being offered to children via social care.

As reported in July, pupils' experiences of the pandemic have been varied. Some, despite restrictions will have felt safe and mostly enjoyed their time at home during the lockdowns. For others, it will have been challenging. Schools and teachers are used to supporting their pupils through challenges they face in life- however the current situation has not been faced before and schools will continue to ensure children and young people have a good educational offer.

This report will outline what interventions and strategies have taken place in schools and within social care to, where possible, mitigate the affect and impact of the pandemic and improve the outcomes for all children and young people.

1. Recommendation(s):

- 1.1 Children's O&S are asked to support the work that schools are undertaking to enable children and young people to experience a positive learning opportunities.**

1.2 Children's O&S are asked to recognise the work of children's social care to improve outcomes for children and meet their needs as we have entered the recovery phase of COVID-19.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 On 18 March 2020, the Secretary of State announced that schools, colleges and early year's settings in England would close after 20 March 2020-except to children in priority groups. Following the announcement, schools and education institutions were closed to most students by the start of the week commencing Monday 23 March 2020 across all of the UK.
- 2.2 Approximately 80% of schools in England, and 98% of schools in Thurrock, remained open for the priority groups, which included the children of critical workers (for example NHS staff, police, teachers and supermarket delivery drivers), and vulnerable children including: those with a social worker; looked-after children; and those with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) due to their special educational needs. Children who did not fall into the above categories were expected to stay at home with suitable care.
- 2.3 During the first lockdown, schools were closed to most students for a period of around 14 weeks, during this time the schools developed an on-line learning offer for those children and young people who were not part of the priority groups outlined above.
- 2.4 Schools re-opened for the autumn term in September 2020, but were closed again for a period of around eight weeks from January 2021. However, attendance for those pupils who were allowed to attend was approximately 10%. The next time schools were open to most students was 8 March 2021 when national attendance rates returned to near normal (94-95%). However, due to high infection rates in Thurrock 13.8% of Thurrock secondary school students were self-isolating and not attending school.
- 2.5 Whilst schools were closed, partially closed or open for all, they were expected to be able to provide remote learning for students self-isolating or remaining at home. Various studies undertaken across the country evidence that there were many factors affecting how much remote learning a child or young person engaged with, including socio-economic, gender, age, phase of the pandemic and rates of infection locally.
- 2.6 Ofqual's report 'Learning During the Pandemic' aimed to quantify how much time students in different circumstances spent studying, or not studying, across the course of the pandemic. They wanted to understand the narrative around 'lost time'. Ofqual states: The concept of lost learning time is a complex one, with different narratives which have changed throughout the course of the pandemic. A hypothetical GCSE student who started their course in 2019, the overall amount of lost in-person learning time up until the end of their course in May 2021, could range from as little as a few weeks (for

example for a student who was attending school throughout both school closures as the child of key workers) to the full 44 teaching weeks that will have passed since the start of the first lockdown, which equates to around two thirds of their course (for example for those who were shielding throughout the course of the pandemic). The question of lost time must also take into account the amount of time students spent learning at home, and this figure could range from zero to over 5 hours per day for students in different circumstances

2.7 To gain a greater understanding we surveyed the schools in Thurrock to gain further insight into the strategies and interventions that they have used to reduce/mitigate the effects of the pandemic upon the children and young people. We would like to thank the Head teachers/ Principals of all of the schools that contributed in the gathering of this information.

3. The Impact of COVID on children identified by primary and secondary schools

3.1 Emotional, Mental Health and Wellbeing

3.1.1 All schools that responded said that the emotional, mental health and wellbeing of students had been affected by the pandemic. Many students enjoyed the time at home but some suffered significant loss in their family and found the isolation difficult. Some children and their families experienced domestic violence and or concerns over their family contracting the virus. There has been an increase in anxiety and mental health concerns that all schools are dealing with. Children have been referred to Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health Services provided by NELFT but schools have also put other strategies in place including, additional pastoral and nurture support, play therapy, school based or external counselling and employing additional Family Support Workers. Most schools have increased their counselling offer which are higher than was available prior to the pandemic.

3.1.2 One Multi-Academy Trust has engaged in a Trauma Perceptive Practice pilot, others have worked with Educational Psychologists and other services in training for trauma informed practices for all staff.

3.1.3 Secondary schools reported that although students were not externally examined, they were teacher assessed and given 'centre assessed grades' so exam anxiety was still a significant pressure felt by students who acknowledged that they had gaps in their knowledge.

3.1.4 Students who were already anxious before the pandemic continued to experience an increase in their anxiety. Schools made sure they were in constant contact with these students to help to reduce the impact of lockdown.

3.1.5 Schools also recognised that students' general fitness and physical stamina was reduced in a majority of students and in some cases students had noticeably gained weight and were less fit. Schools have worked on

increasing both stamina and fitness levels in direct PE time as well as at breaks/ lunch/ after school activities. Out of school clubs and programmes such as Duke of Edinburgh, sports clubs and events have resumed in most schools now. Some schools have also extended their use of Forest Schools to enable children's social, emotional and mental health as well as physical health to be addressed.

3.1.6 All schools have increased the time spent on pastoral care, circle time, and well-being activities. Bereavement support was also provided by some schools as well as online assemblies and activities to support children's wellbeing and mental health.

3.1.7 Schools also reported that they have strengthened or broadened their enrichment activities such as Trailblazers, introducing music/ instrument lessons/ visitors and museums outreach for example. This was to mitigate the impact of school educational trips and visits that were unable to take place during lockdowns.

3.1.8 Young people mentioned deteriorating mental health during the pandemic. Mentoring by the youth workers, qualified in providing mentoring, has been implemented by the post 16 team with the following feedback: 'I feel a lot more confident in knowing what I want to do in the future, and also feel that I have a better relationship with my friends; it's nice having someone to listen to me for a change; I feel happier knowing it is not just me who is struggling'.

3.1.9 Schools have worked with mentors and mental health ambassadors to support the emotional and mental wellbeing of students.

3.2 **Socialisation**

3.2.1 Schools reported that children had missed social contact, so in the main they were very pleased to be able to return to school to see their friends and staff in school. However there was a noticeable difference in some children's ability to socialise and make friendships, negotiate squabbles and follow routines. Schools noticed that the younger children have fewer social skills and fell out with their peers more often than usual.

3.2.2 It was also reported that younger children missed out in the influence of older children due to the 'bubbles' and restrictions that were still in place when schools finally opened to more pupils. Children new to secondary school this academic year had experienced a turbulent year 5 and 6 and then transition to secondary school was weakened, which has caused 'primary behaviours' to continue for longer than usual. Head teachers also felt that this was also compounded by lack of opportunities to socialise with extended family and members of their community.

3.2.3 Schools spent a great deal of time at the beginning of the return to school on improving social skills as well as peer mediation.

- 3.2.4 Schools used innovative techniques to support students through transition periods, including videos of what to expect, live transition online meetings, virtual tours of the schools, the use of Facebook and other social media to communicate with students and their families.
- 3.2.5 It was also noticed that although socially children depend on their phones and social media, due to being isolated for so long they found it harder to communicate verbally and some pupils lacked confidence to speak in groups and interact in the same way.

3.3 Behaviour and self- regulation

- 3.3.1 Some schools have said that behaviour since the return to school has been challenging; one school has seen an increase in exclusions (albeit from a very low baseline). Another school reported that children were much more volatile than before the pandemic and this is being addressed with ongoing work building on children's social and emotional skills. Some children have lost the ability to self-regulate as well as general courtesy, so this has also been a focus for schools.
- 3.3.2 There was a heavy emphasis in some schools on re-establishing routines, revising rules and establishing schools as a safe place to enjoy and learn.
- 3.3.3 Schools responded by purchasing on-line training for staff in de-escalation techniques, reviewing their behaviour policies, and increasing pastoral support.
- 3.3.4 Learning behaviours have also been affected with nearly all schools who responded reporting that stamina and resilience amongst students had reduced.

3.4 Impact on families

- 3.4.1 As previously reported, some families experienced great loss and family bereavement. There was also a rise in domestic violence which has resulted in additional pressures at home. There was a rise in the number of families eligible for free school meals and schools also reported an increase in the need for foodbanks and food vouchers. One school reported that parents were struggling to manage behaviours.

Parents of children with SEND

- 3.4.2 Through parental engagement activities we were able to learn that parents felt isolated and that their children really missed out on therapies, and diagnoses were delayed.
- 3.4.3 A significant number of appointments were cancelled or delayed and then made virtually; this is a direct result of health staff being redeployed to help with the challenges in the hospitals during the height of the pandemic.

3.4.4 Some parents reported that their children attended school throughout the lockdowns and that was very helpful. Family conflict increased in some households, whilst in others they enjoyed working closely with their child/ren and learning together.

3.5 Impact on learning

3.5.1 Schools reported that the reduction in stamina and resilience has impacted negatively on younger children's writing and presentation skills as well as their ability to concentrate for longer periods of time.

3.5.2 Some schools reported that in the main most students who engaged sufficiently with online learning had made some progress but more able students had not made as much progress as had been expected had they been at school.

3.5.3 Younger children who are less able, relied heavily on parental support to access online lessons and where this was not possible they did not make as much progress as expected. There were also some families who chose not to engage with online learning. Where possible schools tried to get these students to attend face to face lessons with the vulnerable groups.

3.5.4 However other schools said that some students excelled with online learning and made better progress than expected.

3.5.5 Quality first teaching remains the biggest strategy in most schools' toolbox. Assessments at the beginning of term/ wider opening of schools were used to identify gaps in knowledge and skills. Schools have employed a wide range of intervention strategies and have made use of additional funding made available through Government catch up funding. These have included use of the National Tutoring Programme for key year groups or student groups to enable them to catch up. NELI Early Years Language support programme for those with speech and language delay in the early years. The Recovery Premium was used to target children who attracted the Pupil Premium Grant (FSM eligible) in raising attainment and progress in reading, writing and maths. Some schools have employed additional Teaching Assistants/ Learning Support Assistants/ Higher Level Teaching Assistants to support small groups of students with social/ emotional and academic foci, other have employed an additional teacher/s. (**appendix 1 – Catch up funding explanation**)

3.5.6 The Education Endowment Foundation is an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. They are funded by a government grant to research the most effective methods for interventions/ catch up. All schools responded to say that they regularly use EEF approved/ researched strategies to help pupils who have fallen behind to catch up.

- 3.5.7 Some schools introduced holiday catch up programmes during the summer, after school catch up programmes, Saturday schools and summer schools. One secondary school extended the length of the school day to catch up for an hour longer in every subject over a two week period. They also increased the teaching load of their teachers to ensure they could manage the additional lessons financially.
- 3.5.8 Many schools supplied laptops for children or used the Government laptop scheme to supply them. This enabled most children to access the remote learning offer during the lockdowns and for any periods of bubbles self-isolating etc. The Government have recently announced that they will be providing more laptops and tablets to schools and colleges. Schools were invited to order their allocated number of devices at the end of October with an expectation that the majority of devices will be delivered before Christmas.
- 3.5.9 One school noticed that year 11 pupils had been significantly impacted by loss of learning but also during mock interviews employers said that pupils did not have sufficient information to put on their CVs. This was due to not being able to take part in the usual clubs, part time volunteering and other hobbies and activities that 16 year old student usually engage in. As a result the school has engaged the Volunteering Service to work with the children and provide them with opportunities.

3.6 **Impact on children with SEND**

- 3.6.1 Children and young people with SEND have met with colleagues through a range of engagement activities.
- 3.6.2 Children reported feeling isolated and out of touch with their friends due to the lockdowns and inability to meet friends. As a result of this 'Hangout' was developed. A youth club for children and young people with SEND. Following feedback from year 9 students who wanted to attend a youth provision but 'Hangout' was too late in the evening for them and they also weren't confident around older people, 'Junior Hangout' was developed. This provides a safe place for youth with SEND to express and be themselves.
- 3.6.3 We have listened to the voice of the young people regarding their ambition to participate in musical activities. As a result, the Careers Manager in collaboration with Thurrock Music Services, Art Council and the Youth Team are delivering a music youth club for children and young people with SEND.
- 3.6.4 Grangewaters accommodated 73 young people with SEND over the summer and September providing outdoor education, accredited sailing courses and paddle sport awards. Some of the feedback that we have received: *I like to have independence on the water. It's a lot of fun, even when I get wet. It's good to be out and having fun.* From a parent: *It's good to see that there are no limitations for people with SEND on this course'.*

- 3.6.5 The Duke of Edinburgh team have conducted a number of successful expeditions where young people with SEND have attended and fulfilled the requirements to gain the expedition section of their Award. This includes an alternative Bronze expedition carried out for one participant with medical needs which incorporated the rest of her walk group (seven in total). Another participant completed his Bronze assessment within a mainstream group in Norfolk.
- 3.6.6 A new Prince's Trust Team started in September: young people (five with EHCPs) are planning for their 12-week programme, identifying their strengths and areas of development as well as personal learning targets.
- 3.6.7 The younger students at Beacon Hill Academy were most affected by the pandemic in terms of social interaction. They also missed out on assessment and support from health professionals who were redeployed.
- 3.6.8 Since returning to school the staff at Beacon Hill have noticed many positive impacts including happy children and parents and students who were calm and relaxed. They also noticed that their students enjoyed the activities and therapies once they resumed.
- 3.6.9 The Speech and Language team at Beacon Hill have focused on supporting the children to explore their feelings, identify them and name them.
- 3.6.10 Students with SEND became more proficient with using technology on the whole and schools worked with the families to support the students with the technology. There is a comprehensive report in **appendix 2** written by the SEND Inclusion and Support Officer in the SEND Service, which details how students with SEND utilised technology throughout this period.
- 3.6.11 Inspire Careers had conducted a second young person voice gathering exercise during July – August 2021. (**appendix 3**) The purpose of it was to find out how our young people with SEND were feeling about the academic year that had just completed, what was the impact of Covid and what further support we could offer them. 109 households were contacted; 63% of contactable were parents/carers; 37% were young people. 69% of the young people confirmed they have returned to their course full-time; 29% confirmed blended delivery whilst 2% confirmed they have not returned (Inspire Careers are working with these 2% to bring them back into EET)). 69% stated that Covid-19 affected them in a negative way; 43% felt that there are less available opportunities for them than before. 83% were happy with their course; the 11% who were not satisfied blamed missing too much practical learning and falling behind during lockdown. 68% felt positive about the future, whilst 26% were worried about catching Covid-19, losing their social skills and jobs availability. Inspire Careers and the Preparing for Adult team are using this useful feedback to work with the SEND young people and help them overcome the barriers mentioned.

3.7 Rise in elective home education (EHE)

- 3.7.1 There was a marked increase in the number of families that elected to home educate (EHE) their children. In September 2019 (pre-pandemic), there was 140 children who were recorded as EHE by the Education Welfare Service (EWS). This rose dramatically in September 2020 to 357 and for September 2021 there is currently 350 children and young people who are EHE. This was reflected in other local authority areas across the country.
- 3.7.2 Reasons given for EHE ranged from fear of catching Covid, families with vulnerable/ elderly family members and shielding to realising that they enjoyed the ability and opportunity they had to be able to educate their own children during lockdown, as well as lack of confidence in schools to keep children safe.
- 3.7.3 EHE is a right of all parents and the EWS has robust processes in place to monitor the suitability of EHE. If the provision of education at home is found to be unsuitable, parents are expected to make an application for a school place. Advice is also made available to parents [What it means to home educate | Home education | Thurrock Council](#)

3.8 Attendance rates

- 3.8.1 Even after schools returned to being open for all, attendance rates in Thurrock were significantly lower than across most of the rest of the country. In autumn 2020 primary absence rates for England were typically 4-5%, in Thurrock this rose to 20% and in secondary schools this rose to 30% due to high numbers of positive cases in the borough.
- 3.8.2 Attendance rates since schools returned in September 2021 have remained fairly stable at 90% which is lower than before the pandemic but in line with attendance rates nationally. This is due to the number of children testing positive with Covid-19.

3.9 Safeguarding

- 3.9.1 A small number of Schools reported that they noticed some online safety issues and anti-social behaviour towards staff online. There was also a small increase in the number of children and young people affected by County Lines and at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation at one school.
- 3.9.2 Schools reported making more referrals to MASH and third sector agencies such as foodbanks and other crisis supports.
- 3.9.3 During the time schools were partially closed, they all made regular contact with vulnerable children, children with SEND and those open to children's social care. This was either through regular phone calls, online monitoring, video calls or house calls.

4. Children's Social Care's response to Covid-19:

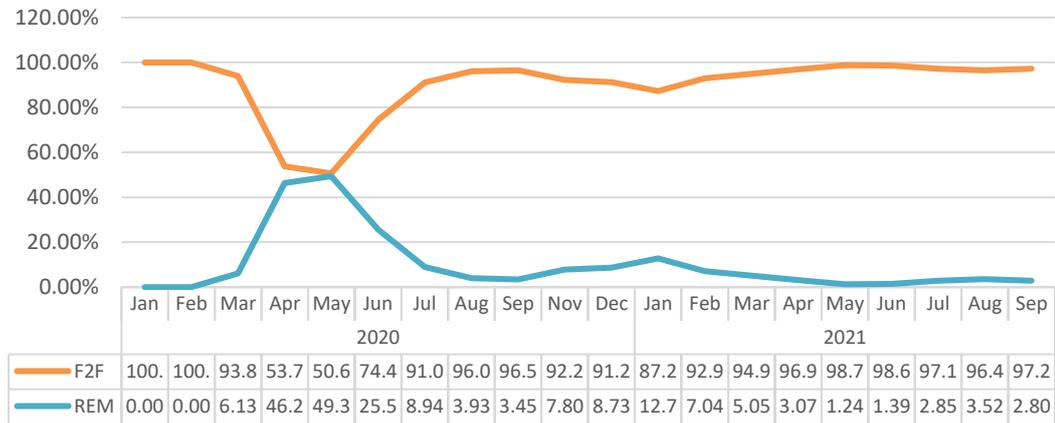
- 4.1 Children's Social Care has continued to deliver a good level of service to ensure the safety of children and young people within the community of Thurrock. Remote visits are by exception and the vast majority of visits to children and young people are being completed face to face. Covid 19 Risk assessments are carried out if there is a perceived Covid risk, to establish if a virtual visit/contact is required and necessary and that all risks are considered to ensure children, their families and staff are safe.
- 4.2 Hybrid working has developed within the service and staff have adapted to agile working arrangements with a combination of virtual meetings, face to face meetings and visits and working from home and in the office environment where required.
- 4.3 Ofsted carried out a focussed visit on 30th June and 1st July 2021. This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework and was adapted to reflect the COVID-19 context. The Focused visit was announced on the 16th June 2021, two weeks before the Focused Visit began. During those two weeks the inspectors were provided with over 100 documents, copy of audits undertaken relating to the topic, performance data and they undertook inspection meetings with the Children's Portfolio Holder, the Chief Executive and partners working with children affected by extra familial harm. The focused visit was very thorough and inspectors examined the experience of children through the lens of social work interventions, by talking directly to social workers and examining their case work files in detail. They also met with children and young people. The Inspectors were focused on evidence of outcomes for children subject to extra familial harm and the impact social work intervention is having for children and their families. The two days of 'on-site' inspection was very intense and thoroughly tested the practice of the service and the corporate support and commitment from the Council as a whole for our most vulnerable young people. In relation to children's social care's response to Covid in Thurrock, Ofsted stated in their feedback letter dated 09th August 2021;

The local authority has been creative and adaptive throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring the continuity of responsive services for vulnerable children. Leaders have issued guidance, put structures and support in place to ensure the ongoing safety and protection of children and their families, and of their staff. Staff have been consulted and actively involved in shaping future services in preparation for the ending of COVID-19 restrictions.

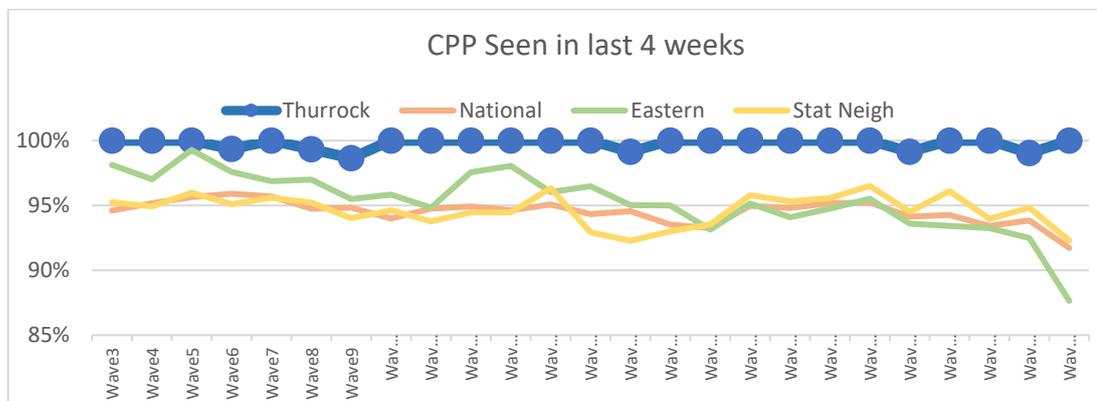
- 4.4 Throughout 2020/21 there was a fluctuation in the volume of contacts and referrals received by the service due to the impact of COVID-19; reducing during the months of lockdown, and significantly increasing after the ease of lockdowns. The numbers of contacts have begun to stabilise with less fluctuation.
- 4.5 Visiting children face to face is a priority and returning to pre-Covid arrangements. The graph below shows visits to children during the pandemic

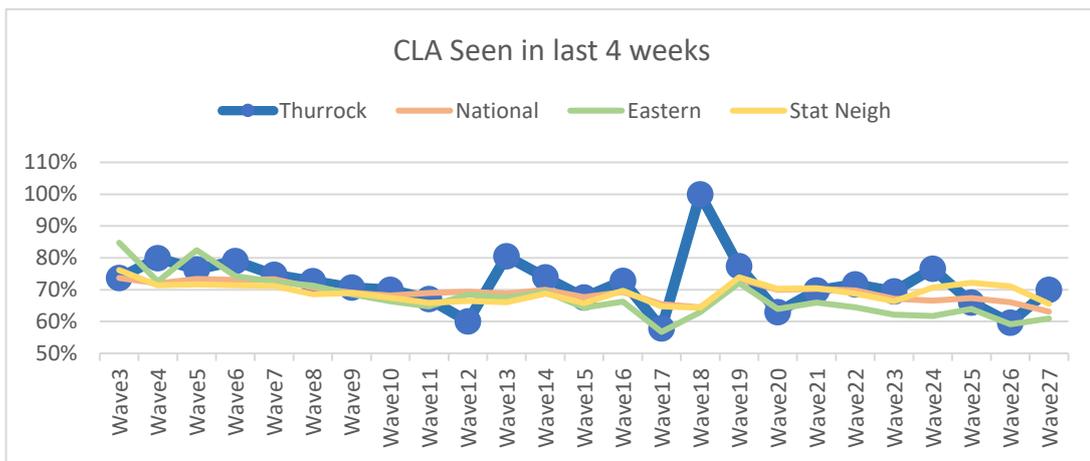
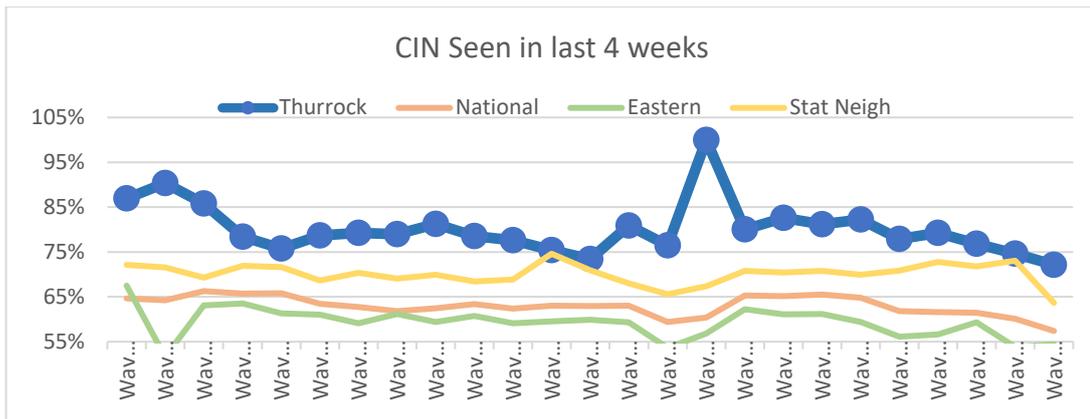
year and coming out of the pandemic up to September 2021, starting with a little over 50% of visits in April and May 2020 being remote visits, moving to face to face physical visiting almost exclusively through to April 2021. Social workers and managers are clear that children and young people need to be physically seen in order to effectively safeguard them.

Remote (REM) and Face to Face (F2F) visits



4.6 The three charts below have been taken from the DfE National Wave data returns up to September 2021 completed by children’s social care through the pandemic. These charts evidence strong performances for children being seen in Thurrock, against national, statistical neighbours and Eastern Region outturns:





- 4.7 We continue to maintain a rota of core staff within the office, with safety measures in place as appropriate. The service has largely returned to business as usual with the exception of some meetings continuing to operate remotely and staff adapting to agile working with partners and families. As Covid restrictions have eased, staff have returned to the office for team meetings, supervision and to ensure the service is covered appropriately.
- 4.8 We continued to offer a range of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities to the workforce supplemented by the in-house weekly programme. The DCS, Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker continue to facilitate virtual monthly forum meetings with practitioners to receive feedback and discuss any emerging issues. These have been well received and feedback has been positive.

5. Children Looked After – Local Authority Duties

- 5.1 On the 24th April 2020 the government temporarily amended regulated duties to Looked After Children via the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 which extend the existing flexibilities in the primary duties until 30th September 2021. The amendments have now expired and duties to children looked after continue to be met in line with pre-Covid arrangements.

6. Fostering Service

- 6.1 The Fostering Service reviewed its practice in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Government's guidance. Our approach during the pandemic was to provide services as usual to Foster Carers who continue to care for children during the pandemic albeit remotely. Visits have now resumed face to face with foster carers unless there is a clear Covid risk.
- 6.2 Network and support meetings have been held remotely and are now moving to face-to-face meetings. A small number of foster carers have re-evaluated their arrangements as foster-carers post Covid and have made a decision to relocate and resign from fostering.

7. Planning including multi-agency meetings

- 7.1 The use of technology supported Social Workers to ensure that meetings such as Child Looked After reviews, Child Protection Conferences and Strategy Meetings continued. As restrictions have eased, there have been some hybrid meetings, with some attendees in the office, joined virtually by other members of the professional network. The service is now working towards key meetings such as Child Protection Conferences being held as hybrid or in person.

8. Supporting family contact

- 8.1 We continue to prioritise contact between children in care and their birth parents. We have adopted a blended approach to contact and for some young people they have found a combination of virtual and face-to-face contact beneficial.
- 8.2 Our contact centre, Oaktree has increased the level of face-to-face contact while adhering to all the government advice regarding safety measures. The below chart shows the increased levels of face to face contacts taking place each month, the majority of contacts taking place is face to face.

MONTH	F2F IN HOUSE	F2F COMMUNITY	VIDEO
MAY 2021	175	0	129
JUNE 2021	216	5	104
JULY 2021	218	15	86
AUGUST 2021	177	19	63
SEPTEMBER 2021	189	14	67

9. Participation and Engagement of Children and Young People

- 9.1 The Participation & Engagement Officer is increasingly working in partnership with other services e.g. inspire, School well-being, SEND, Open Door, and Youth Cabinet working face to face with young people as we have emerged from lockdown rules. This has resulted in greater inclusivity in relation to children and young people who take part in events and therefore the learning from their views. There is a bi monthly newsletter, which always has a blog from at least one young person, and often it is designed by a young person too.
- 9.2 The recent events have produced one animated video and there will be a further video to promote the Children in Care Council.

10. Supporting the Court Process

- 10.1 The service has worked closely with our legal team and the courts to ensure that court proceedings continue to progress permanency plans for Children, with minimal delay. Senior Managers and Legal Services continue to work closely with the Designated Judge of the Local Family Courts in order to ensure an effective response to changing situations. The Local Authority has also worked closely with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) to look at delays in proceedings and the impact of Covid to progressing outcomes for children. Hearings have now moved from being entirely remote and the Courts have adopted a Hybrid approach for some cases.

11. Supporting Education and Employment

- 11.1 During the pandemic when access to physical education was limited, the Virtual School worked closely with Social Workers and Foster Carers to make sure that the educational needs of our Children and Young People were met. Has children have returned to school the service continues to work closely with the school through network meetings and regular monthly meetings with school leads.
- 11.2 The Corporate Director and Assistant Directors for Children's Social Care and Education continue to meet regularly with CEOs of the Academy Trusts and the Leader of the Primary and Secondary forums, to discuss any emerging trends and ensure effective communication between schools and Children's Social Care.

12. Care Leavers

- 12.1 The Aftercare Service has maintained good communication with care leavers to limit their isolation and provide practical and emotional support. The service provided financial support to the young people, based upon their personal

circumstances, with additional financial support made available in early 2021 from the Covid Winter Grant.

- 12.2 There is good networking in place across the different departments, including Headstart Housing, Homelessness, Housing Allocations along with Tenancy and Neighbourhood Management to support care leavers. Enhancing transitions work with Adult Services is at an embryonic stage, they are part of the housing meeting and a work plan is being developed progressing policies to ensure more integrated working.
- 12.3 In October 2021, the additional £20 per week Universal Credit payment that young people have been in receipt of, during the pandemic ended. The impact on Care Leavers is being monitored and the work to ensure there is an EET (Education, Employment or Training) offer will support young people into training and employment so the impact of reduced Universal Credit can be mitigated.

13. Future planning in relation to Covid-19

- 13.1 During the pandemic, we have used an adaptive and robust, approach to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and our workforce. There is a collective confidence in the actions taken by Children's Social Care and Education to safeguard and support children and young people of Thurrock during the pandemic.
- 13.2 Undoubtedly, the past year has presented a number of challenges. We have promoted agile working within the service and have embraced the philosophy that work is a thing you do, rather than a place you go. We have moved to business as usual with an aim that families and children do not received less of a service and can achieve good outcomes. We remain mindful to the changing situation and needing to adapt as required.

14. Reasons for Recommendation

This report gives an overview of the Covid-19 support and response in Thurrock, and is provided as information for members who may be new to the Committee.

15. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

None

16. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

None

17. Implications

17.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

Additional funding has been provided to schools from the government to support during the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools were able to access IT equipment to support children and young people with an online learning offer. Additional funding has been provided to support with summer schools and the impact of this will be reviewed in the autumn term.

17.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

The Local Authority is subject to all the normal legal duties to vulnerable children and young people under a range of legislation including the Children Act 1989 and Children and Families Act 2014. The Coronavirus Act 2020 allowed some relaxation to the duties placed on the Local Authorities. This Act expires 2 years from 25th March 2020 unless otherwise extended. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 were made under the 2020 Act and were amended later in 2020. These were further amended by the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 which extended the flexibilities in the primary duties until 30th September 2021. These flexibilities have now ended.

17.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager Community Development and Equalities

Thurrock has a strong partnership approach with schools and local communities and this has ensured that children and young people can access an educational offer. We have seen a significant focus on vulnerable groups recognising that the attainment gap for children and young people who are disadvantaged is more evident. Working closely with our schools we will continue to monitor these children and young people to ensure that we continue to reduce the attainment gap.

Our approach ensures the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and our workforce, this includes action taken during the pandemic. This report demonstrates the action taken to ensure that Children and Young People are

safeguarded and that they have continued access to support in relation to their needs. We will continue to work closely with schools and providers to ensure that emerging from the pandemic arrangements, the progress and opportunities for pupils with SEND are closely monitored and supported to enable them to have the best possible outcomes.

17.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

None

18. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

19. **Appendices to the report**

Appendix 1: Covid-19 Catch up funding
Appendix 2: SEND Engagement – Utilising Technology
Appendix 3: Survey of Young People with SEND

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