



Vale of Glamorgan Council
Social Services Directorate
Children and Young People Services (CYPS)

Safeguarding Children at Risk
Arrangements and Guidance for Partner Agencies 2020
CYPS activities to safeguard children and young people during
the COVID-19 pandemic

Document date: 28th April 2020

Introduction

This document outlines Child and Young People Services operating model during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has been designed to inform partners, and other interested parties of our activities during this crisis. It explains the plans made regarding visiting children, young people and families, and describes individual team arrangements for maintaining support to vulnerable children, young people and families at this time.

We are aware that in this period, there may be heightened concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children living in the Vale of Glamorgan. We continue to recognise our duties and responsibilities to children, young people and families in the Vale of Glamorgan and are working, together with our partners, to ensure that our most vulnerable children, young people and families remain protected and supported throughout this crisis.

The arrangements detailed here are based on current Government and Public Health advice and are designed to minimise any risk to children and families and our workforce in spreading the COVID-19 virus. They remain subject to change, and will be updated as necessary, in line with official advice and guidance from the relevant public bodies.

Rachel Evans

Head of Service

CYPS visits guidance for all teams

All children and young people known to CYPS will have had, or are in progress of having, an individual Vale of Glamorgan CYPS COVID-19 risk management plan developed. This plan considers safeguarding risks and the wellbeing of children and young people where we would normally be offering support via face to face visits. Where possible other ways of working i.e. telephone calls/video calls/conferencing etc, will be used to support children and young people, balancing the safeguarding risk with the risk of spreading the COVID-19 virus.

Our first position is that face to face activities will be minimised (including statutory child protection, youth offending and children looked after visits, reviews etc) and only offered where the risk to the child or young person outweighs the risk of potential virus spread. If partners or extended family members can help build a picture of a child or young person's safety they will be asked to contribute to the COVID-19 risk management plan. If visits are required, workers will use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where a 2-metre distance cannot be maintained as described in line one of table 4 of the Government guidance. Given the dynamic nature of risk, the plan will be reviewed regularly.

Team arrangements

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All teams in CYPS are working remotely and can be contacted on the following numbers and individual staff members can also be contacted directly via mobile phone or email.

Section 1 - Families First Advice Line (FFAL) 0800 0327 322

Outreach and home visits are suspended however FFAL are maintaining a telephone service open to families and professionals.

Section 2 – Families Achieving Change Together (FACT) 01446 729640

FACT continues to offer families a range of support remotely by telephone/video calls/conferencing. They are accepting referrals via FFAL for families not open to CYPS, as per their usual criteria.

Section 3 – Flying Start 01446 732180

Flying Start Early Years and Parent Support teams are providing support remotely to children and families who have been identified as most vulnerable/in need of support through this crisis period. In addition, the staff are producing a plethora of resources for parents on Facebook and You Tube platforms, available to all families (registration with Flying Start not required).

Childcare for children who are vulnerable, or have parents who are key workers, is available, and can be accessed through:

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/living/social_care/children_and_young_people/Family-Information-Service/Family-Information-Service.aspx It does not matter if they are known to Flying Start Services or not.

There is a telephone helpline for families needing health visitor advice, contactable on 029 218477 49/44/48

Section 4 – The Vale Parenting Service

The Vale Parenting Service is running a reduced programme of face to face support, in line with Government and Health guidelines, but have developed social media platforms (You Tube and Facebook – ‘Vale Flying Start’) to showcase a range of parenting support. New referrals are made by contacting FFAL (number above) and parenting support is undertaken via phone calls or WhatsApp live chat (where the parent consents).

Section 5

- ❖ Intake and Family Support (IFS) Team: 01446 725 202**
- ❖ Care Planning and Proceedings (CPP) Team: 01446 725 202**
- ❖ Children Looked After (CLA) Team: 01446 725 202**
- ❖ 15 Plus Team: 01446 725 202**
- ❖ Child Health and Disability (CHAD) Team: 01446 725 202**
- ❖ Placements (Fostering) Team: 01446 725 202**

- ❖ Children’s Safeguarding and Service Outcomes 01446 704719**

- ❖ Emergency Duty Team: 02920 788 570**

These teams are working remotely and are only conducting face to face visits where necessary, informed by the COVID-19 Family Risk Management Plan, and agreed by the Team Manager. Face to face visits are all conducted using social distancing and where necessary with PPE personal protective equipment, informed by the circumstances of the visit and the level of risk. All other work (meetings, panels etc) in line with our statutory responsibilities are offered by telephone or video calls/conferencing.

- Referrals/reports about children

There is no change; our arrangements for receiving reports are being maintained although staff are working from home. However, partners are reminded to telephone

01446 725202 (or EDT out of hours) where referrals are urgent. We are assessing reports in the usual way and determining the action required. Where this requires a face to face visit, this is being undertaken in accordance with Government and Public Health advice.

- Out of hours responses/EDT

Our Emergency Duty Team (02920 788 570) are operating as normal, as are our Senior Officer on call arrangements meaning that a Chief Officer (Head of Service or Operational Manager) is always available if needed, and escalation processes remain the same. Our fostering team have an on-call rota for our foster carers to access out of hours support as needed

- Immediate protection and urgent action

As above; our processes for assessing and responding to risk are being maintained with a focus on safeguarding children, we are experiencing increasing challenges in placement capacity as pressures in families increase and demand at the edge of care is expanding. In that context we are doing everything we can to increase our placement capacity and our ability to respond in an emergency, working closely with partners.

- Strategy discussions/meetings

These continue to take place where required, utilising conference calling/virtual meeting platforms. Colleagues from partner agencies will be invited as needed, and attendance and actions arising from strategy discussions/meetings will be retained by CYPS.

- Section 47 investigations

Will continue and we will adhere to normal processes, albeit with the application of necessary precautions in the context of Covid-19.

- Child Protection Medicals

The UHB have taken steps to ensure they can continue to undertake CP medicals where this is necessary. We are able to carry out our role but with the application of necessary precautions in the context of Covid-19.

- The Child Protection Register and Initial and Review Conferencing Procedure

The Vale of Glamorgan Safeguarding and Service Outcomes Team will continue to facilitate as many Child Protection Conferences and Child Looked After Reviews as possible, whilst acknowledging and complying with Government and Public Health advice.

Initial and Review Conferences continue to take place. The CP Chairs are prioritising ICPC's and reviewing the plans of children where the risks require continued registration. The Children's Safeguarding Team will facilitate as many Review Conferences as is possible, giving priority to those where there are more serious concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children, or where the Social Worker (and Core Group) is confident about the evidence that harm has reduced, and de-registration is appropriate. Some Review Child Protection Conferences will be postponed based on levels of need and the emerging staffing situation. These arrangements are reviewed fortnightly.

Conferences are being undertaken utilising conference calling/virtual meeting platforms. Parents/carers are included in these meetings as are children (where appropriate) and will also be invited to participate where they have a smartphone, tablet or laptop. If this is not possible, arrangements will be made to include the parent/s via telephone conferencing.

We recognise the challenges and frustrations that many parents will have in not being able to engage in a physical meeting. Many parents will also likely be managing children in the home while participating in a Conference. It will be the Conference Chair's responsibility to make sure the parent is as fully involved with the Conference as possible. Chairs will seek to liaise with carers/people with parental responsibility prior and post Conference to establish their views. This limitation further highlights the importance of all professionals appropriately sharing (via phone or video discussion) their reports with families in advance of Conference.

Partner agencies will be conference called in the meeting and the CP chair will inform all participants of how Conferences and Reviews will be conducted. Active offers of advocacy for children/young people continue to be made.

If Review Child Protection Conferences cannot be arranged in the same way as Initial Child Protection Conferences due to capacity, quoracy, practical or other problems, consideration will be given to the CP chair conducting a Review as a sequence of separate discussions. In these situations, they will:

- Consider all the professional reports as per usual practice
- Discuss with child/parent(s) over the phone as fully as possible
- Discuss with partner agencies over the phone as needed
- Write a detailed summary which will be the record of the meeting along with professional reports.

Where consideration is being given to removing a child's name from the Child Protection Register using the above system, considerable caution should be used. If there is doubt about the safety of this decision or is not unanimous then the child's name will remain on the Child Protection Register.

- Wellbeing assessments

Are being carried out virtually, and lateral checks conducted as normal.

- Carer assessments

Young carer assessments can be accessed by contacting FFAL (number above).

Adult carer assessments can be accessed by contacting Cardiff and the Vale Carer Gateway on 02921 921024

- Care and Support Plans and Core Groups

Work is continuing to develop and monitor all plans (both Care and Support and Care and Support Protection Plans), but remotely in line with Welsh Government guidance¹. Oversight of children on the CPR is being undertaken; remotely as far as possible and face to face where the assessment of risk requires this.

- MARAC arrangements

Social Services representation at MARAC meetings are continuing with a Team Manager from Adult Services and Children Services participating. These are taking place via conference calling.

- MAPPA arrangements

Statutory representation and participation from social services is continuing. All MAPPA L2 and L3 meetings are taking place via telephone conferencing

- Oversight of professional concerns

The Team Managers for Children Safeguarding continue to receive and screen all such reports. All activity and responses continue to take place during this period, and where needed strategy discussions/meetings take place via remote platforms /conference calls. Reports/referrals continue to be sent to the Children Safeguarding mailboxes, and appropriate discussion with partners, employers, etc. continues with no change.

- Procedural Response to Unexpected Death In Childhood (PRUDiC)

PRUDiC is a multi-agency procedural response when a decision has been made by the police that the death of a baby, child or young person up to the 18th birthday, is unexpected. PRUDiC applies to all deaths in children except stillbirths; neonates who have never been discharged into the community and the death is expected; and children with a life-limiting condition known to Palliative Care.

¹ <https://gov.wales/childrens-social-services-during-covid-19-pandemic-guidance-html>

PRUDiC process will continue to apply unchanged where there is an unexpected death of a child that meets the criteria. This decision is made by the police and the initial meeting process is coordinated by the Cardiff and Vale UHB Safeguarding Team. The relevant Children's Services Operational Manager will be identified to attend the meeting virtually. The Children's Services Operational Manager will also ensure that Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Welsh Government (WG) are informed as part of the process.

- Pre-proceedings/ Public Law Outline (PLO) processes

Continue to be utilised as necessary via Legal Gateway Meetings. Families who are subject to PLO processes will have had a COVID-19 Family Risk assessment plan, which remains subject to review. Informed by the risk assessment, visiting will take place remotely if possible, unless agreed otherwise by the relevant Team Manager.

- Family Court (Public and Private) hearings

Applications to Court are made where agreed by an Operational Manager. All Court hearings are managed by the Court, and CYPS respond accordingly. Where needed, workers will attend and give evidence remotely, from an agreed site where social distancing and assessed PPE can be utilised. We are aware that some Judges are postponing more complex hearings, as they do not consider virtual hearings appropriate in those situations.

- Children who are looked after

We are doing everything we can to support our children who are looked after in the home that they are currently living in. Face to face visiting is taking place in line with the COVID-19 Family Risk Management Plan, and if possible virtual visits are being conducted. Our foster carers continue to receive whatever support they need to care for our children and young people.

We do have current challenges in respect of placement demand, and therefore capacity, but where a child has to move, or is newly looked after, we do all we can to secure an appropriate home for that child.

- Complex Needs and Placement Panels

These panels will be conducted virtually once we have tested the secure virtual platform and invites and papers sent to partners electronically. In the meantime, requests for placements are being considered by Operational Managers.

- Family time (contact)

Is being offered virtually in line with Welsh Government guidelines², and continues to be supervised where needed.

- Placement with Parents

We continue to support our children living with their parent/s on a Care Order and are using the COVID-19 Family Risk Management Plan to inform whether that support takes place virtually or face to face. Where new Placement with Parent arrangements are required at the current time, these are been assessed and authorised in the usual way.

- Children Looked After Reviews

Children Looked After Reviews continue to take place utilising conference calling. IROs are ensuring they maintain contact with children/young people who are looked after and following the same timescales for holding reviews and where necessary escalation pathway.

All Child Looked After Reviews are currently being undertaken virtually with the IRO speaking to all parties to track and monitor plans. Online video platforms are being utilised to facilitate this virtual meeting. Notes and a record of this will be made by the IRO on the existing 'Monitoring Form' and 'Chairs Report'. A reference will be added clearly at the beginning of the report to explain that the review has been held remotely due to the Covid-19 situation.

The child/young person should be spoken to separately before the review, via video conferencing or telephone, to ascertain their views and wishes. They should be included in the review in the same way as other members, where it is possible to do so.

There is also an understanding that full participation in the review by the carer might not be possible due to caring responsibilities for other children. The IRO will therefore take responsibility for ensuring that a separate discussion takes place with them to include their views.

IROs will continue to fulfil their statutory duties in relation to monitoring the child's plan and escalate any issues accordingly.

It is recognised that some reviews might need to be completed in stages, via separate telephone or video conferencing. The IRO will endeavour to bring together and communicate the plans and recommendations to all parties.

² <https://gov.wales/childrens-social-services-during-covid-19-pandemic-guidance-html>

Some reviews may be will be postponed based on levels of need and the emerging staffing situation. The arrangements for these reviews are reviewed on a fortnightly basis taking account of staff levels and impact of COVID-19.

- Fostering

We welcome new enquiries from people wanting to become foster carers on 01446 725202.

Fostering Panel is being conducted virtually, with invitations and panel papers being sent by secure email.

- Short breaks/respite

The need for short breaks is being assessed on an individual basis and are only taking place where there has been a risk assessment indicating a priority need. Where children are having a short break, social distancing and assessed PPE will be utilised in line with Government and Health guidelines to protect all involved.

Section 6 – Youth Offending Service (YOS) 01446 745820

All face to face contact between professionals and children, young people and families undertaken by the Vale of Glamorgan Youth Offending Service (YOS) is being risk assessed in accordance with the restrictions associated with the current pandemic. This means the YOS is undertaking its duties remotely unless there are circumstances that dictate the need for a face to face visit or attendance, and then with appropriate precautions being taken.

Practitioners have been advised to work from home and undertake telephone contact with children.

As the first priority, the YOS will ensure that Appropriate Adults, attendance at Court and supervision of high-risk children and young people takes place, whether this is in present or via remote methods,

Where access to systems and availability of practitioners permit, the YOS, will undertake remote contact with children and young people subject to Community Court Orders, Out of Court Disposals and engage with children open to Prevention Services.

Discussions continue with partner agencies to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to providing contact for children, young people and families and to enable interventions to be delivered.

The YOS is engaging remotely in external partnership meetings, such as MAPPA, and Child Protection and Children Looked After meetings.

Section 7 – Support Services

- Adolescent Resource Centre

This service will continue to provide virtual support by WhatsApp / phone calls to young people and their families. They will undertake visits when agreed where there is a high risk of placement breakdown and where there are significant concerns about safety.

- Action for Children

Action for Children are working remotely and providing support to children and families virtually. They will undertake visits where agreed with the relevant Team Manager and Social Worker and will use social distancing and assessed personal protective equipment in line with Government guidelines.

Action for Children continue to provide support and short break/respite services in line with care plans for our most vulnerable children and families open to Child Health and Disability Team.

- Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS)

The Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) and Early Intervention Team (EIT) will be accepting referrals to complete a brief intervention with families. Due to the nature of the service, the primary reason for a brief intervention during COVID-19 will be to establish a comprehensive safety plan with families and their support network over 3-4 sessions.

IFST and EIT continue to work with existing families, offering booster sessions, reviews and maintaining weekly contact to reduce triggers and prevent escalation. IFSS will continue to provide information and signpost families to other services where required.

The Community Reinforcement And Family Training (CRAFT) team continue to accept referrals and are offering this service on a 1-2-1 basis via telephone/ video calls. CRAFT are also able to offer small family groups, where the family has the technology to link in with the practitioner.

- National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)

NYAS continue to make the active offer, and to provide advocacy to our children and young people, where they want it. This is conducted virtually at this time.

- Llamau

Are working with the 15 Plus team, and continue to support our young people as needed, virtually if possible. We are seeking to work with our young people to minimise any need to move.

- The Vale of Glamorgan Psychology Service for Children who are Looked After

This service is offering virtual bespoke support, where needed, to our children who are looked after. Referrals to this service are made by allocated Social Workers electronically, and actions are agreed by an Operational Manager and Developmental Trauma Service Clinical Psychologist.

Section 8 – Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Regional Adoption Collaborative 01446 706152

VVC continues to offer a service within priorities that follow National Adoption Service guidelines. Some staff have been re-purposed to other roles within the local authorities across the region.

The Adoption Support Team has continued to function remotely with an emphasis upon supporting those most vulnerable. An exercise has been undertaken to highlight the higher risk cases, the support required and where face to face visits are required these are risk assessed as above.

The current situation has impacted upon the delivery of our Letterbox exchange, but this is being facilitated wherever possible via email.

An initial decision was made to pause adoption introductions but following the development of a national risk assessment these are now being considered on a case by case basis.

Matching meetings have continued to be held and the team are continuing to remotely family find via the Adoption Register / Linkmaker and through the circulation of profiles of children waiting.

New referrals regarding children requiring adoptive placements are continuing to be processed and ADM meetings are being facilitated remotely. The inability to provide adoption medicals for children referred is impacting upon adoption decision making in some cases.

Adoption panel is prioritising the most urgent children and families and is in the process of being conducted remotely following the procurement of a secure online platform.