

Agenda Item	7
Report No	HCW/11/20

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

**Date:** 26 August 2020

**Report Title:** Overview of Data Reporting to Scottish Government

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer – Health and Social Care

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 In response to the Covid19 pandemic in March 2020, the Scottish Government published Supplementary Child Protection Guidance to ensure continuity of services in relation to Child Protection. This includes guidance in relation to assessment of children and young people, visits to families, and arrangements for child protection meetings.
- 1.2 In April 2020, the Scottish Government announced weekly collection of data in relation to Vulnerable Children during the pandemic. This report aims to highlight data indicators in relation to these three key areas, with some additional findings taken from narratives both locally and nationally in relation to COVID issues for vulnerable children and young people.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Consider and comment on the findings of this report.
  - ii. Note the creative ways in which services and partners have ensured contact with vulnerable children, young people and their families during the Covid 19 pandemic

### 3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource – There are resource implications regarding increased challenges placed on the Health and Social Care workforce as identified at 5.3, 5.6, 5.7, 6.2, 6.3 and 7.1 of this report.
- 3.2 Legal – There are some legal implications due to the emergency legislation provided by Scottish Government where services have required to comply within. There is also some

associated reporting requirement by the CSWO to Scottish Government arising out of this legislation.

- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) – The report highlights a number of community issues. The Health and Social Care workforce are frontline staff and have continued to undertake all their duties and meet their statutory requirements throughout the pandemic. The workforce are frontline and provide essential services within communities supporting the most vulnerable children and their families. These challenges are outlined throughout this report.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever - None
- 3.5 Risk – This report highlights risks and mitigation in section 5.4
- 3.6 Gaelic - None

## **4. Background**

- 4.1 COVID-19 is thought to have had a significant impact on children, young people and families across Scotland. The subsequent closure of schools and community facilities along with lockdown restrictions implemented in March 2020 meant children and young people were potentially isolated from wider family networks and professional supports. The true impact of COVID is unlikely to become clear until schools and childcare facilities reopen in August with families having increased access to wider support services.
- 4.2 In April 2020, the Scottish Government announced weekly collection of data in relation to Vulnerable Children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data focussed on three key areas:
  - Visits to Children on the Child Protection Register (CPR)
  - Contact with children and young people with multi-agency plans in place
  - Young people entitled to Aftercare provision

## **5. Child Protection**

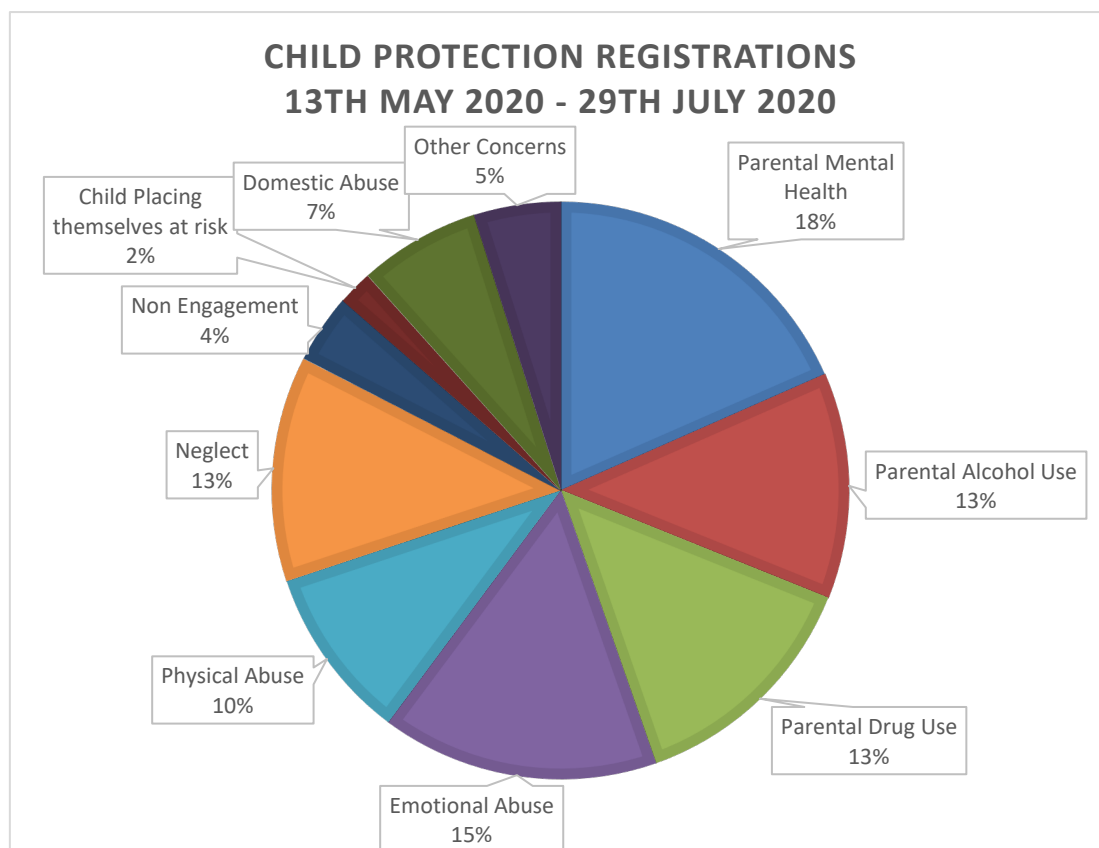
- 5.1 Since COVID-19 restrictions were implemented, child protection registrations have increased by 41% in Highland. There were 90 children on the child protection register on 23rd April 2020, and as of 29th July 2020, there were 127 children registered. This compares with an average of 85 for the same period in 2019. There have been 26 de-registrations and 9 Child Protection Orders during this period. 8 children have become subject to compulsory measures of supervision and are now looked after away from home. The main reason for compulsory measures is non-engagement by family members and where Social Work have been unable to access children and young people.
- 5.2 It should be noted that the increase in child protection registrations does not necessarily indicate an increased number of children at risk of harm. It could indicate a more cautious approach from professionals with heightened awareness of the possible impacts of COVID-19 on children and families. Work is underway to establish reasons for increasing registrations during this period.
- 5.3 The increase in child protection concerns has had significant impact on workloads within local Family Teams and the Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officer Team. In Phase 1 of the National Route Map this was also compounded by limited physical access to children and families for assessment purposes, and the introduction of virtual meetings and contact. However, for some Youth Justice practitioners, they have reported

increased levels of contact with young people during this period as they are more available and comfortable using technology for contact purposes.

#### 5.4 Risk Factors Identified

Throughout COVID-19 there have been concerns nationally about the level of domestic abuse children and families may be experiencing. The Scottish Government requested submission of specific data in relation to registrations which included domestic abuse as a risk factor. In Highland it was agreed that an overview of all risk factors would be maintained to establish a fuller picture of the impact of COVID-19.

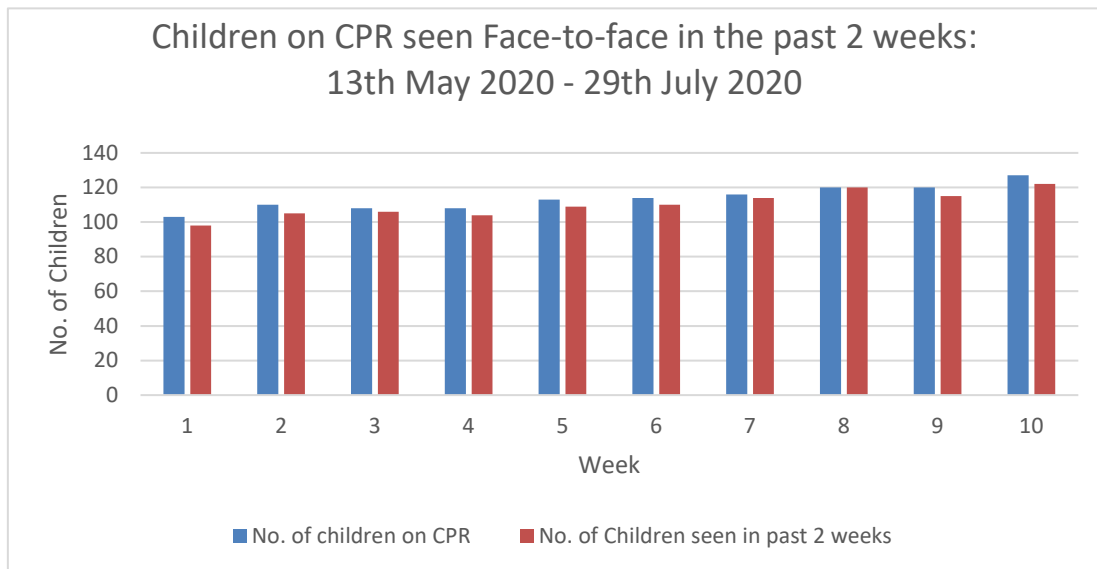
5.5 From the diagram below, the data shows that whilst Domestic abuse has featured in 7% of Highland registrations during this period (11 cases), it should be noted that parental issues including Parental Mental Health and Parental Substance Use featured in 44% of all registrations. Emotional abuse (13%), Physical abuse (10%) and Neglect (15%) also featured more significantly than Domestic abuse. Please note: Child Protection Registrations can include more than one risk factor. Therefore, the total number of registrations does not match the total number of risk factors.



#### 5.6 Contact with Children on Child Protection Register

Within the Highland Child Protection Guidelines there is a requirement for all children on the Protection Register (CPR) to be seen face-to-face a minimum of fortnightly. In Phase 1 of the pandemic, Social Workers reported finding face-to-face visits difficult as these often-involved doorstep/window/garden visits which proved challenging in ensuring the home environment was adequate and in having difficult and confidential conversations in a public space. However, Social Workers were creative in their approaches using technology and telephone contact, socially distanced visits and use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where appropriate to carry out visits as lockdown restrictions have eased. Phases 2 and 3 have enabled more home visits to take place indoors giving staff more opportunity to have difficult discussions with families and make a fuller assessment of risk and need.

5.7 The chart below highlights that the majority of children were seen at least once per fortnight as required (an average of 96%). Where children were not seen, valid reasons were provided on a weekly basis. In the main, this was due to children being placed with alternative carers and/or family members and were safe. There have also been occasions where children have been on planned breaks with wider family members deemed to be protective factors. 100% of children have been contacted by phone or video calling during each two-week period. Feedback from Managers and Teams has also highlighted more regular visits to families based on need, along with weekly contact by telephone and/or use of technology.



## 6. Children and Young People with Multi-Agency Plans

6.1 The data indicator within the Vulnerable Children report focusses on contact with children and young people with multi-agency plans in place including all Level 3 and 4 plans. The majority of these plans are managed within Education (2666). It should be noted that there is no requirement for weekly contact to take place. However, the Scottish Government included this as a data indicator to monitor levels of contact with children and young people considered 'vulnerable' with multi-agency plans in place.

6.2 During the school term, contact was made with an average of 98% of children and young people on a weekly basis from the Education Service. Where contact was unable to be made, further discussion with the Practice Lead (School Years) took place and where necessary, a welfare visit from Police and/or Social Work occurred. Where required, child protection/child's plan meetings were organised to discuss any concerns. Understandably contact has reduced considerably during the school holidays with plans led by Education in hiatus during this period. Contact continues with children on the child protection register and those looked after and accommodated.

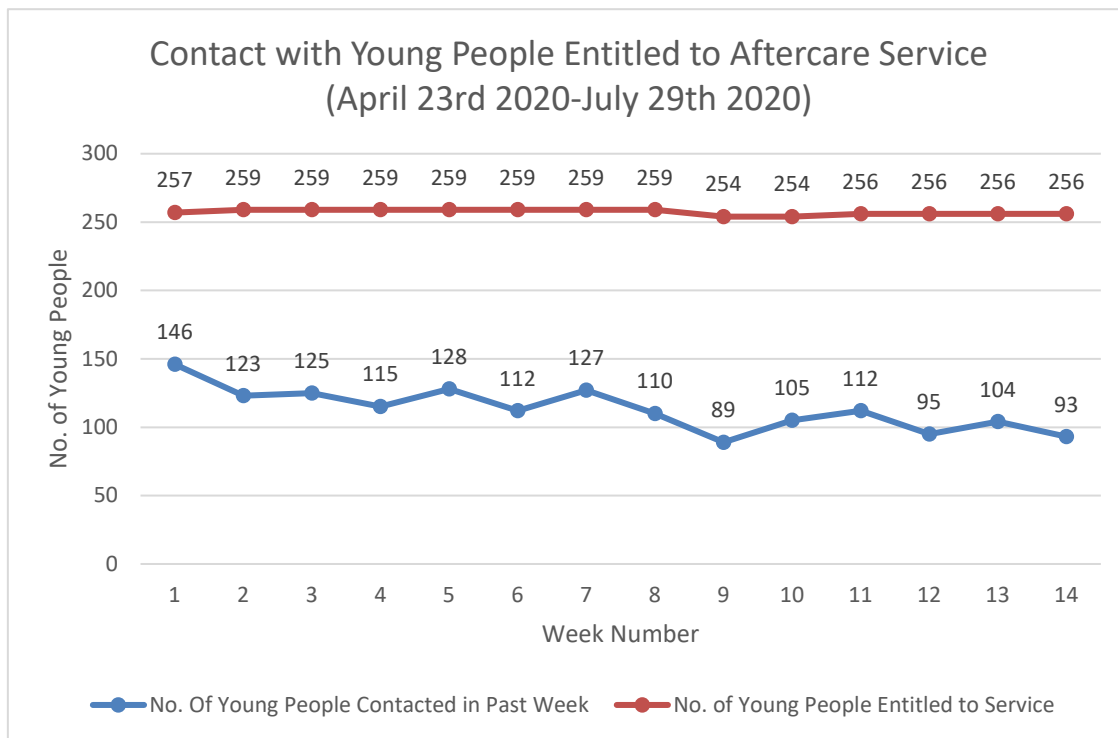
6.3 For children and young people with health led plans in place, Health Visitors have continued to make regular contact with vulnerable families in Highland. They have reported that families have been more difficult to contact. When contact has taken place, parents have reported on the impact of home schooling over the last few months.

6.4 Health visitors have continued to deliver the Universal pathway in line with Scottish Government Guidance. This now includes the 4 month and the 4-5-year contact being carried out face to face. Visits to vulnerable families both face to face and remotely

continue as previously. Families are still keen to have contact with Health Visitors and many are requesting face-to-face rather than remote contacts.

## 7. Young People Entitled to Aftercare Support

7.1 There are currently 256 young people in Highland entitled to aftercare support. Throughout COVID-19 young people have had been contacted to establish if any support is required. On a weekly basis this has varied between 31% and 46% of young people eligible taking up the offer of contact which is shown in the graph below. However, it should also be noted that of the young people who have requested contact, 100% receive this weekly contact.



7.2 **Who Cares?** Scotland published a report on the impact of COVID-19 on care experienced young people in April and May based on intelligence from its ongoing work which includes advocacy support, helpline, and participation activities. The following three key themes were identified:

- **Poverty:** Many care experienced people (including care experienced parents and kinship carers) were struggling financially, including not having enough money for food. This was partly due to the increased costs of food and utility and digital access bills during lockdown, and partly because some care leavers, living independently for the first time, were not being adequately supported during this transition and are struggling to manage their finances. Reductions in access to financial support and delays in the social security systems were reported.
- **Information and participation:** Concerns were raised about a lack of digital access; leaving some young people feeling isolated and without a voice and preventing them from accessing services and education.
- **Health and wellbeing:** Increased existing, and new, mental health concerns (associated with social isolation, bereavement and tensions within personal relationships) were reported, particularly for young people living in temporary accommodation away from their usual support networks.

<https://www.whocaresscotland.org/what-we-do/policy/reports-and-research/impact-of-covid-19-on-scotlands-care-experienced-community-may-2020-2/>

- 7.3 Whilst these reports related to all care experienced young people, the findings are similar to Highland reports of issues faced by young people eligible for aftercare during the lockdown period. These included:
- Substance Use issues
  - Financial pressures
  - Anxiety/Depression
  - Social isolation
  - Past trauma and Phobias
  - Parenting
  - Grief and Bereavement issues
  - Poor health
  - Housing issues
- 7.4 Additional support for care experienced young people in Highland is offered through Barnardos, Who Cares? Scotland, Calman Trust and the CHAMPs Board. During lockdown the following initiatives have been offered to young people through services:
- Home and Belonging sessions
  - Virtual home-baking and lunch parties
  - Informal support online
  - One-to-one support and advice
  - Advocacy
  - Postal contact
  - Socially distanced walks with workers
- 7.5 Work is underway to establish new methods of engaging with young people entitled to aftercare provision to ensure they are aware support is available for them if and when they need it.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 This report focusses only on the data collection processes relating to the Vulnerable Children data set required by the Scottish Government. It does not include the views of children and young people, families or professionals other than those provided as part of the weekly data submissions. It is only possible to note recorded contact from required sources although it is recognised that many other Third Sector and Statutory partners continue to have additional contact with children and families throughout this period. The gains made during lockdown measures in terms of virtual contact should not be lost in the new normal. However, with measures easing and schools returning to some sense of normality in August, it is hoped that a wider range of assessments and interventions can be made available for our most vulnerable families. Practitioners have strived to ensure children and young people with plans in place have continued to be supported during COVID-19 restrictions and it is reassuring to note the high levels of contact that has taken place throughout this period.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Health and Social Care

Date: 17 August 2020

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