

Kingston Parent Consortium 20 March 2020, notes of conference call

Due to COVID 19 events the regular meeting was delivered via conference call with the agenda focusing solely on an update on COVID 19 implications followed by Q&A.

Attendees

Parents / carers:

Agnieszka Czerwinska

Bev Pass

Staff:

Ian Dodds (Director of Children's Services)

Karen Lowry (AfCinfo/SEND Local Offer Website Manager)

Ashley Whittaker (Programme Director)

ID provided an update on the latest COVID related events:

- Schools are closing for the majority of children and young people from today. Children of key workers and vulnerable children will be able to continue to attend if that fits their individual circumstances and needs. The definition of "vulnerable" is broad and for SEND includes all those with an EHCP and may also include those with SEND and without an EHCP. Parents and carers should speak to schools directly if they have any questions about whether their child can continue to attend. (Latest DfE guidance is available here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>)
- The situation in schools may evolve depending on resources available and the number of children accessing provision. Provision during school holidays remains to be confirmed. In time schools may be arranged in hubs / localities so that provision can continue to be provided with less staff.
- Schools are being sent guidance with more detail on opening arrangements on 20/3.
- Residential schools providing for children and young people with EHCPs are to remain open.
- AfC is in the process of identifying what services will be available going forward, for example support in the home and short breaks (where AfC is aiming to expand inhouse provision by redeploying youth services staff).
- Some commissioned providers are either closing or reducing their offer and this will impact what is available locally. Services provided by Challengers, Enhanceable (in Richmond) and Action for Children (overnight short breaks at Warren Park) have all been impacted / reduced, although some may be able to restart in time.
- Ultimately the type and volume of short breaks provisions will depend on staffing capacity.
- **Question from parent:** "Will there be a change to how Direct Payments can be used?" ID confirmed that guidance will be forthcoming on that in due course. It is expected that more flexibility will be provided in terms of what Direct Payments can be spent on. Important also to consider Government and Public Health guidance on e.g. those over 70 years providing care / support.
- **Question from parent:** "The government has decided that children with EHCPs should still be supported after mainstream schools have closed. Additional government advice is that vulnerable people with underlying conditions should self-isolate. There are children with EHCPs requiring 1:1 support in order to access education, and some of those children have been advised to self-isolate so can't attend school. Would it be possible to deploy teaching assistants funded to provide 1:1 support to a particular child, to work with that child at home? Or could Medical Tutoring be provided, although that would require additional funding and special arrangements with the Education Inclusion Support Service with regards to secondary school pupils. Continuation of 1:1 support to facilitate distance learning at home can be seen as a reasonable adjustment within the Equality Act 2010. Equality legislation provides that LAs must not discriminate against disabled children and are under a duty to eliminate discrimination, foster equality of opportunity for disabled children. (...) LAs should make reasonable adjustments to alleviate disadvantages faced by disabled children." When schools know how many children they will be catering for from Monday they will be able to plan how their resources are

allocated and whether off site provision will be possible. Medical tuition may also be an option and if / when this is being considered the child's assessed need will be a more important factor than the cost of providing this.

- **Question from parent:** "Will home tutoring continue?" subject to the availability of resources / people, yes.
- **Question from parent:** "What will happen to the EHCP process for example assessments, annual reviews, tribunals etc" The government is due to issue new legislation on Monday, and it is inevitable that some aspect of the process will change. The local area is in the process of prioritising essential services, and this will require a redeployment of resources which may include eg therapists. Court services are also announcing new ways of working e.g. virtual sittings. The new legislation is likely to relax local authorities statutory duties to give them more flexibility. ID is keen to discuss with the Parent Consortium / Parent Carer Forum what we do locally going forward when we know what these changes are. It's important to note that much of the EHCP process relies on several different professions, all of whom will be impacted by the current situation. AfC is committed to doing as much as can be done in the context of these difficult times.
- Service planning is looking at a 12 week scenario, ie going out to July
- **Question / observation from parent:** "The current situation places families of children with SEND under particular pressure." The additional pressure the current situation is putting on parents, carers and families is absolutely acknowledged and it is expected that we will probably see an increase in safeguarding concerns. AfC recognises the particular additional pressure this will be putting on families with SEND and this is why resources are being refocused e.g. youth workers being redeployed to short breaks.
- It was agreed that this is a rapidly developing situation and that future regular conference call updates would be useful.

- Next conference call: 27 March, 12.30 020 3957 1769 PIN: 622 592 399#