

## **Manchester City Council Report for Information**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 22 July 2020

**Subject:** Children and Education Services response to COVID-19

**Report of:** Strategic Director of Children and Education Services

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### **Summary**

Following the announcement of 'lockdown' Manchester's Children and Education Services adopted a 'Business as usual but doing it differently' approach. This has enabled the service to respond to children in need of help, support and protection and work with Manchester's schools.

Staff and schools should be commended as the vast majority of Manchester's schools have continued to remain open, educate children in a creative way and plan for their future educational destination. In addition and in accordance with the announcement that attendance is compulsory from 1st September 2020 we are actively planning with Manchester's schools and Public Health to ensure students are safe and we are able to respond swiftly to any situation/outbreak of Covid19 that may arise; noting DfE guidance continues to be published.

Listening to young people is central to the work of the Directorate. Whilst a great many children have yet to attend school, we have considered the feedback from those who have attended school since the covid 'lockdown' has been relaxed. This has informed the Directorate's work with Neighbourhood Services to put together a comprehensive summer programme. The aim of the programme is 3 fold, to promote their mental health and well being, provide 'things to do' and help them and their care/family prepare for the start of school.

In respect of children's services throughout the 'lockdown' period and since relaxation of those arrangements contact has been maintained with children allocated to a social worker; a sampling of records indicate the vast majority are 'face to face'. In recent weeks there has been a noticeable increase in requests for a social work service and need for statutory intervention.

It is worth noting that issues relating to children with SEND and financial viability of Early Years PVI settings and the impact on children's services more generally continue to present significant challenges. The risks and impact continue to be raised with government departments by the Local Government Association/Chief Executives and Association of Director of Children's Services (ADCS).

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the impact, progress and response of schools, children and education services to the presenting challenges of Covid19; with a specific focus on the support being provided in respect of planning for the start of the new academic year in September 2020.

## Recommendations

Scrutiny Committee members are invited to consider the content of this report, continued work of schools, children and education services directorate and the councils partners to promote the learning, welfare and safety of children in Manchester. In addition it is recommended committee members:

1. Explore the decision making and approach adopted by the the Directorate to respond to children in need of help, support and protection
2. Explore the decision making and approach to enable children to safely attend school from September 2020 and access a learning environment.

## Wards Affected: All

**Environmental Impact Assessment** - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

As part of the preparation for the start of the academic year in september 2020, parents and carers are being encouraged to walk, use public transport and cycle to work; making use of and accessing schemes that support such approaches.

| Manchester Strategy outcomes  | Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS   |
|---|--|
| A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities | It is important we build a safe, healthy, happy and successful future for all of Manchester's children so that they can benefit from and contribute to the sustainability of Manchester thriving, economically diverse and successful. Children's Services work with those children who need help, support and protection so they can make progress in terms of education, training, social development and subsequently contribute and benefit from living in Manchester. |
| A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success                   | Children and young people matter in Manchester. The work of the Children and Education Directorate is driven by a commitment to provide opportunities and achieve positive outcomes; building a safe, happy, healthy and successful future for all of the city's children and young people   |
| A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities    | Increase the influence Manchester's children and young people have on decisions that impact on them by supporting and enabling their voice to be heard   |
| A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit,   | A safe and effective children and education system is important to promote the awareness and   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| work  | inclusion of children in the engagement of wider societal issues; which together with a successful education offer make Manchester a place parents choose to visit, live and work. |
| A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth | Continually improve outcomes for all children and 'reduce the gap' against the national attainment average   |

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

None

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In Manchester, throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the majority of schools have remained open to vulnerable pupils and children of key workers and all schools and colleges have retained contact and an overview of all their pupils. This has included a significant number remaining open for vulnerable children and key workers during the school holiday periods with many schools staying open during bank holidays as well. Following the easing of lockdown restrictions in June, Manchester schools have been working to safely increase the numbers of children who are accessing school and this offer as at 13th July 2020 has increased to approx 12% school population. Attendance however, has not been uniform across the City and as previously reported there are some communities/wards with low take up of school places. It is considered and agreed a Council wide approach will be required to promote confidence and increase attendance and especially from September 2020 when it will be compulsory.
- 1.2 Throughout this time, officers from the council have been working with education leaders to support them with their current offers both for children who are still attending, and for the many more who are learning from home. This has included regular communication, virtual meetings with headteacher and schools leaders with responsibility for different roles across different phases and partnerships, school governors, Early years settings and Trade Unions. The Council has provided model policy documents, templates for risk assessments, staff risk assessments, step by step guidance on response to infection, regular HR and Health and safety advice and direct support for individual schools as well as distributing PPE, over 3000 laptops and 7500 books to every child in year 6 as part of a City wide transition read. All schools have provided their completed risk assessments which have been reviewed by the health and safety team.
- 1.3 There has been a significant amount of work to ensure that year 11s have secured a destination for September 2020. All year 11s have been written to directly and currently over 70% have a confirmed offer which is higher than usual at this time and Colleges are reporting a much higher than usual acceptance rate. There is now targeted work with those young people identified as being at risk of NEET and work being planned to engage them over the summer break including:
- 1-1 support for all year 11 students who have been identified as high risk of becoming NEET.
  - Youth and leisure providers running summer activities will be issued with information and referral cards to distribute to 16 or 17 year olds with secure destinations or needing support with transition.
  - Neighbourhood outreach sessions in NEET producing hotspots to reach parents and families and young people with information about applying for a college or training course and the transition support that is available
  - Social media campaign with key messages directed at young people and parents / carers about the importance of remaining in education, employment or training.

- 1.4 Families with a child with an Education Health and Care plan have also been written to directly to provide information early on during the lockdown and all children and young people have been risk assessed to determine if they were safer at home or as safe/safer in school. Approximately 10% of this cohort have been attending school during this time. In accordance with modification to the Children and Families Act, families have also received a letter outlining the reasonable endeavors that the Local Area would make to meet the provision outlined in their EHC plan - the Local Area has until 31st July to complete this work.
- 1.5 The feedback on the support for schools and settings has been overwhelmingly positive and was recently summed up by the CEX of a national Multi Academy Trust as follows - *Manchester has worked to retain business as usual in a way that they have not experienced from any other LA and she went on to describe the support as 'invaluable'.*

## **2.0 Feedback and learning from schools as they have increased numbers**

- 2.1 Whilst attendance continues to improve, a significant number of children have yet to return to school and as a result their experience since 23rd March 2020 is largely unknown.
- 2.2 We should not make assumptions about children's experiences, as more students return to schools/colleges there are some key themes and issues in their feedback to school staff. These are outlined below.

For some it has alleviated stress and anxiety and for some families it has strengthened relationships as they have not had to struggle each day to get children into school. This is particularly true for some children with additional needs. For example feedback from many children who are looked after also showed that they enjoyed spending time with their carers and had engaged in lots of different activities such as baking, arts and crafts etc which they enjoyed.

- 2.3 Children in general appear to have been very resilient. Children returning to schools have been keen to get back to school and eager to learn and reported that they have been fed up and bored at home. They have also missed seeing their friends. Some children have reported feeling isolated and some are anxious about COVID19 and family members becoming ill. Some schools have reported that initially children seemed quiet and subdued but bounced back very quickly. Overall though, schools are reporting that the children do not seem to be as anxious or be experiencing as many mental health issues as they had thought.
- 2.4 Children who have been in school have enjoyed and benefited from being in much smaller groups. Some children have reported that school has been much quieter and relaxed and they have enjoyed it more than usual. There has been a reduction in incidents for example at the PRU and special schools because of the smaller class groups. There are of course concerns about the children that have not been in school at all.

- 2.5 Many providers have had significantly more engagement with families than they usually would. This has been seen as a strength and schools/settings need to consider how these new relationships are maintained. Special schools have reported that emotionally most families seem to have coped well and have been good at communicating if they are not coping.
- 2.6 Schools from all sectors have been informed by their children that they want to get back to normal and for school to establish known routines. Not everyone needs 'recovery' and most children want school to be as it was when they finished and for normal routines to be restored. Schools need to consider how any recovery work is done through the curriculum and be ready for a delayed response to COVID19 potentially later on in the school year.
- 2.7 Lots of children have learned during their time at home and enjoyed doing different activities with their families. Children have reported doing a whole range of activities at home. This learning should be valued. Schools have reported that some families have done an amazing job and tried really hard to ensure their children have accessed education. It will take time however, to understand the full impact of lost time in school on learning and outcomes. There is also evidence that lots of children may not have been very physically active.
- 2.8 Special schools have reported that they have been surprised by how well children have managed and coped with changes to their routines.
- 2.9 A number of schools are reporting that children with English as an additional language are saying that they have not spoken English for a long time and are a bit more self conscious about this than prior to lockdown. Secondary schools are reporting that children have also not used technical or academic language for a long time and this is evident in lessons where their word retrieval is slower.
- 2.10 Engagement with online learning and live lessons where this has been available is higher than initially anticipated and children across different types of school have reported enjoying these lessons. In some cases such as pupils attending PRU provision, engagement with online learning has been higher than school attendance. Children have used phones to access these lessons and have reported that this is fine. Children like to have remote lessons delivered by teachers that they know - not the same impact when delivered by someone they do not know eg Oak Academy model. However, digital poverty remains a significant barrier for children in many families particularly access to wifi/data and this has meant that some children have not been able to access remote learning.
- 2.11 Some young people have reported that not sitting exams has alleviated a lot of anxiety that they were feeling before lockdown. However, others are worried about not sitting exams and the impact of this on their future and others have reported feeling anxious about the interruption to their education. A high number of children have reported feeling anxious about transition where they are changing schools in September as they have not had the usual opportunities to

visit etc. Colleges in particular are reporting increased numbers of referrals linked to mental health.

- 2.12 Children have reported that they are tired as they have been going to bed later and not used to getting up early.
- 2.13 Having considered the feedback from children and young people and in order to support children and their families in their preparation for the start of the academic year Neighbourhoods Services and Children and Education Services have worked together to develop a summer programme of activities which have the following objectives;
- 2.14 Preparation for Education** - Providing support for children and young people to ensure they are developing the skills for life, which enable them to be ready to learn when they return to formal education in September.
- 2.15 Physical and Mental Well-being** - Ensuring children and young people can be supported to increase their physical activity levels to improve their mental and physical health as well as help to rebuild friendships and routines.
- 2.16 Emotional Wellbeing and Resilience** - Ensuring children and young people have access to the support to increase their emotional wellbeing and resilience.
- 2.17 Things to do** - Ensure there are sufficient opportunities for children and young people to access diversionary and positive activities.
- 2.18 The programme will be aligned with our youth strategy and available for all children and young people, however there is a recognition some children may benefit more than others such as those considered to be 'less well served' and classified by the government to be 'vulnerable'.
- 2.19 The offer will be published and available across the city and a number of school sites, including supplementary schools; providing full day provision for children and young people throughout the summer holidays.
- 2.20 There is a range of activities will be on offer, including sports, arts, culture with a focus on the development of communication, problem solving and team working skills. In addition each provision will host regular drop in sessions for children and young people facilitated by the educational psychology team, in order to provide additional support for emotional and mental well being.
- 2.21 In respect of younger children, The Sure Start Children Centre will be offering over the summer will have a focus on our more vulnerable children and families as well as a focus on school readiness. Referrals can be made to Early Years Outreach Workers across the city who are available to support children and families with information, advice and guidance. The majority of SSCC remain open for delivery of services including the delivery of Midwifery sessions and Food Clubs. Two and Three year olds are being targeted over the summer to

receive activity packs and ongoing support and guidance is being offered to parents to support their child's learning through fun activities.

### **3.0 Government guidance for School Attendance from September 2020 (released 2nd July 2020)**

- 3.1 The DfE issued guidance on 2nd July 2020 setting out the government's plan for all children to return to school and college full time in September 2020. Current restrictions on group sizes will be lifted to allow this to happen although COVID 19 measures will remain in place to reduce the risk of transmission. This means that schools will be required to keep children in class or year group sized "bubbles" and older children will be encouraged to keep a distance from each other and staff. Nurseries, childminders and other Early years providers will be able to lift restrictions on group sizes from the start of the summer holiday. For all settings and schools, this is alongside protective measures such as regular handwashing, increasing frequency of cleaning, reducing the use of shared items, minimising contact in corridors, keeping a distance between staff as well as teachers and pupils and working with NHS track and trace teams and Public Health who will provide guidance when there is a positive case in a school or setting. Schools and setting will all need to produce a new risk assessment to cover all measures taken and employers ( the Local Authority for maintained schools) will need to make active arrangements to ensure these are effective; working as planned and updated as appropriate eg in light of any new advice from Public Health.
- 3.2 School attendance from September will become compulsory again. Local Authorities and schools are required to provide clear and consistent expectations over the summer on school attendance and produce plans for those pupils who are anxious about returning.
- 3.3 Schools will need to resume the teaching of a broad and balanced curriculum and have been provided with £650m additional funding ( approx £91 per pupil) to support pupils to catch up. Schools are to determine how best to use this funding. In addition, the government has directly provided £350m funding for tuition from the National Tutoring programme which will be available for schools.
- 3.4 OFSTED inspections of schools will not resume until January 2021 although they will carry out some visits to schools in Autumn to look at how the system is responding. There will not be a grade provided for this and whilst guidance for Children's Services has yet to be published, it is expected there will be a similar approach adopted.
- 3.5 In summer 2021, all primary assessments will resume in line with usual arrangements. However, there will be adaptations to GCSEs and A levels and OFQUAL will be consulting on these. There will be no performance tables for 2020/21 academic year and any judgements will be based on performance in 2019.
- 3.6 Schools are to avoid large gatherings of children and are advised to use

staggered start and finish times as well as staggered breaks and lunchtimes.

#### **4.0 Proposal Approach for Manchester Schools in September 2020**

- 4.1 In light of the lateness and extent of the government's published guidance for school attendance from September 2020 (approximately 3 weeks prior to end of school year) there is limited planning time. Notwithstanding this Education Services have been working with schools to model and explore a few different scenarios including a full opening. Throughout this, schools have been clear that they want all pupils to return to school in September 2020. However, schools need time to plan for this properly with all of their staff and in light of the current restrictions on limiting staff being in school and the delay in the issuing of this guidance, schools have requested that the Local Authority supports the addition of 2 planning days at the beginning of term due to these exceptional circumstances. This has been agreed with the Executive Member and Strategic Director of Children and Education Services and will provide time for schools to go through their risk assessment and procedures, prepare the building and timetables and ensure all staff are familiar with the approach taken to ensure the safety of all pupils and staff. This is in line with the approach being taken across other GM authorities.
- 4.2 Schools are also planning the phased return of year groups so that staff can spend quality time with pupils before full school returns and they can have a proper induction/orientation especially those year groups who have not yet been into school since March or who have transitioned over the summer to the school eg year 7 and Reception. There is an expectation that schools welcome back all pupils during the week beginning 7th September.
- 4.3 Schools will be required to review their risk assessments and the Local Authority will be required to ensure these are effective. Work is already underway with the health and safety team to update the guidance provided to schools about this and ensure again that all risk assessments are submitted and reviewed by the team. Officers will also work with Public health to ensure the Step by Step guidance in the event of a pupil/adult displaying symptoms of COVID19 is updated.
- 4.4 We now know that from September, school attendance will be compulsory. However, over the summer, there will need to be a collective effort to ensure that all children who are able to attend school and there should be some clear messaging about this including in community languages. There may be a need to target certain communities/wards where take up of places has been low. This should include working with community leaders to support messages. All services working with families should support school attendance and where appropriate there may be a need to do some direct calling on families in order to provide assurance and answer questions etc.
- 4.5 Schools will need to continue to develop remote learning and it is important that all of the gains made here are not lost as going forward as this could be a valuable way of supplementing children's learning and providing continuity if pupils, bubbles or entire schools need to isolate. This remote offer will also be

used to support children who cannot access school because they are complying with clinical or public health advice. Work to support digital inclusion will therefore be important to ensure that all pupils are able to access this offer and there is also potential to use public spaces such as libraries to enable children to access remote learning. The Local Authority will also be working with schools to share practice and expectations of what remote learning should be provided by schools so there is consistency across the City.

- 4.6 Schools are planning to 'restore' routines and normality as quickly as possible but also allow for children who have not coped well during lockdown or had adverse experiences. There should be access to support/services for those children who will need this. This includes access to mental health services where appropriate and social care for advice and support to prevent a spike in referrals. Officers within Children's Services are working with Educational Psychology, Health Services and CAMHs to ensure clear advice and guidance is available for schools. Through the work already started on the Manchester Inclusion Strategy, schools will also be provided with a toolkit and advice about managing and de-escalating behaviour. Manchester has also been allocated funding for a senior social worker to work with our secondary schools to provide advice, guidance and supervision which will provide support for Designated Safeguarding leads from September.

## **5.0 Challenges**

- 5.1 The impact of covid19 has and continues to present a number of challenges for schools in order to ensure children continue to make progress, including ensuring sufficient staffing levels. This should be seen within the government's guidance is clear that any individuals who are unwell should not attend school and in the Autumn term there is a high risk of staff with usual winter illnesses having to remain at home. These challenges include issues such as;
- Timetabling and managing staggered class changes and breaks. Also managing the logistics of some areas of the curriculum such as PE
  - Lunchtimes - limited time by which all children need to have lunch and with staggered use of dining halls this could be protracted.
  - Positive behaviour management approaches and potential risks of an increased use of and need for school exclusion.
  - Achieving and sustaining good levels of pupil school attendance, which will be carefully monitored by the DfE.
  - Gaps in learning and impact on overall outcomes for children particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
  - Ensuring in the event of a potential future or local lockdown that all children are able to access remote learning.
  - Access to public transport.
  - Increased numbers of children and young people who are NEET
  - Access to home to school transport for all eligible children.
  - A potential increase in the numbers of families who opt to home educate.
  - Managing outbreaks and decisions to send home significant numbers of pupils or close a school completely

- 5.2 A key challenge for both school and the Council in September will be having the capacity to manage a full return to business as usual with all pupils in school as well as the additional work that will arise due to managing risks linked to COVID19. As schools fully reopen, the Education team will need to refocus on ensuring the Local Authority are compliant with all statutory duties which will be reinstated, prepare for pending OFSTED inspections including a SEND focused visit and also support school leaders so they are ready for OFSTED inspections which will resume in January 2021 and support them with challenges such as attendance, exclusions and ensuring children are able to make up lost learning. However, the work to support schools and setting manage the risks of COVID19 and deal with any positive tests will also need to continue. Additional capacity will therefore be required to ensure we respond to schools in a timely and coordinated manner and work to avoid any outbreaks of COVID19.
- 5.3 It has also been recommended that schools nominate a COVID lead for the Autumn term as a key point of contact who will have full oversight of this work within their school.

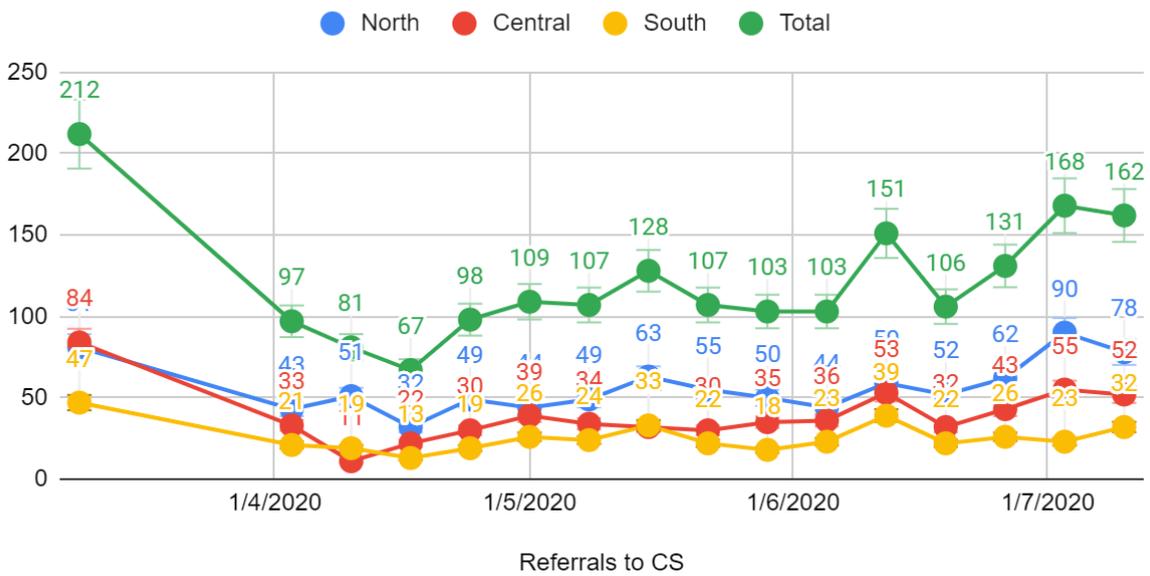
## **6.0 Children's Services**

- 6.1 Children's Services provides a statutory service to c5370 children at any one time. Throughout the period of COVID 19 we have managed staff attendance at work through the use of a rota system which saw staff physically approximately 1/3rd of our staff physically at work, 1/3rd working at home and ready to come into work in case of staff shortages and the final 1/3rd working at home on "Back Office ie " duties, report writing case recording etc.
- 6.2 This approach has served the service well; performance in our key areas has strengthened, both re-referral rates and and referrals with no further action are below our target and are very positive when compared with the performance of core cities, statistical neighbours and other north west local authorities. Other performance strengths since the last report to committee are reductions in the number of children requiring child protection and the number of children subject to a further period of child protection planning within two years both decreasing. The rate of children becoming looked after and overall number of children becoming looked after is decreasing, this trend was apparent prior to COVID 19, however it is likely to increase as services begin to return to normal post the "lockdown" This performance is complemented by strong operational performance with 93.6% of children subject to a Child protection Plan and 96.5% of our looked after children also seen within timescale. Key process indicators are also strong with 97.6% of looked after children reviews occurring on time , permanency plans for children at the second review outturning at 96.97% and 100% of initial child protection reviews being held within statutory timescales.
- 6.3 There continues to be positive levels of staff attendance and multi-agency work across the service and includes:
- Daily 'triage' in Early Help Hubs and Advice and Guidance Service (domestic abuse)

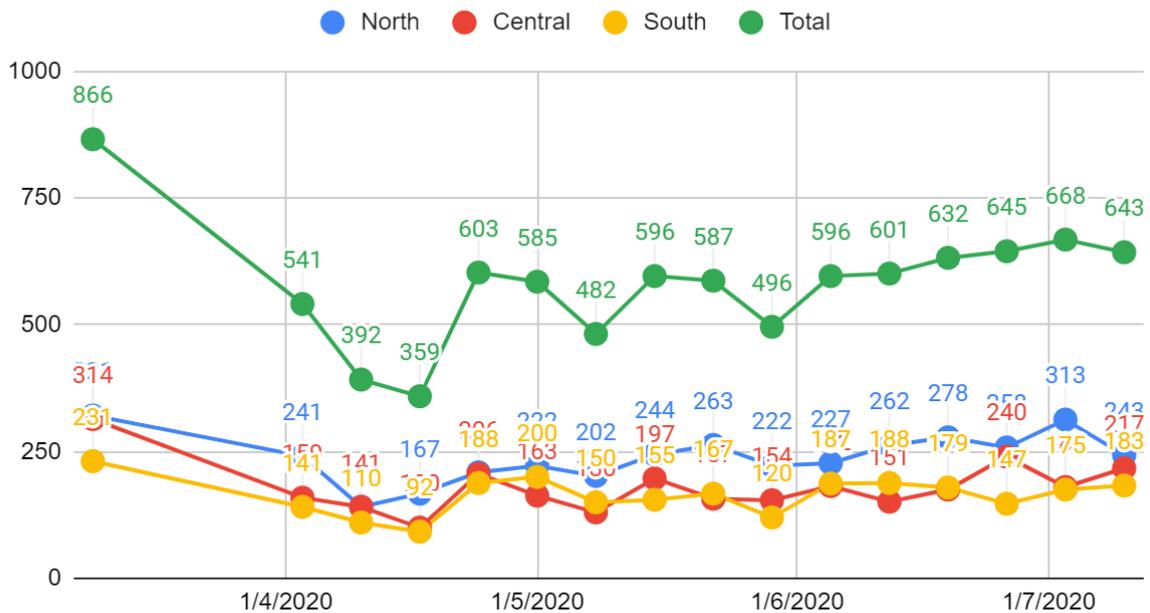
- Planning meetings (Child in Need and Child Protection Core Groups)
- Child Protection Strategy Meetings and Conferences
- Looked after children reviews
- complex safeguarding operations

6.4 The Early Help Hubs are reporting an increase in families experiencing financial/hardship and an increasing number of parents requiring support relating to children's behaviour/parenting. The service continues to invest in partnership working with this remaining strong and arguably strengthened with all statutory partners during the period of lockdown

Assessments started by Locality Pre COVID and April, May and June 2020

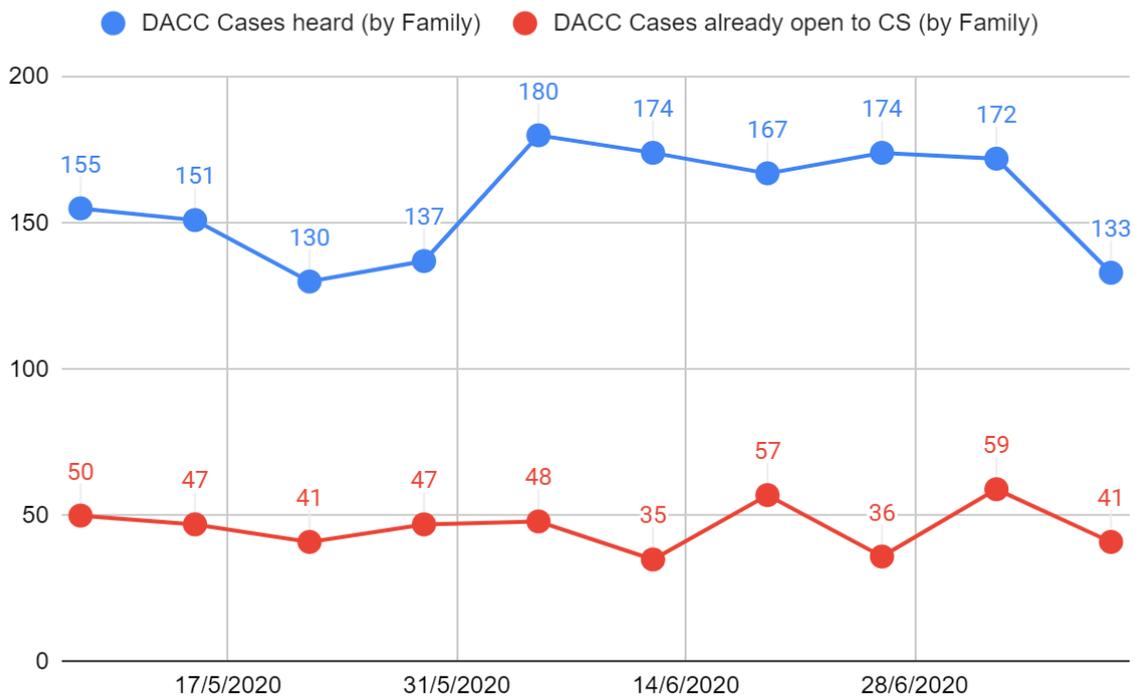


## Referrals to CS pre COVID, April, May and June 2020



6.5 There has been a significant reduction in the number of contacts being made with Children's Services. As can be seen from the above table referrals have incrementally broadly increased since May with varying patterns of demand in our three geographical locality teams. Our co-located Advice Guidance and Support hubs are the front door to children's services. This service manages and oversees the response to reported incidents of domestic abuse. As can be seen the pattern is variable with no discernable pattern of referral. The table below shows the pattern and frequency of Domestic abuse Child care concerns across the City.

## DACC Cases heard (by Family) and DACC Cases already open to CS (by Family)



- 6.6 There are currently 1386 children looked after by Manchester city Council. The relaxing of restrictions has resulted in the contact service beginning to plan for increased face to face contacts , risks assessments, venue planning and approaches to contact are being refined, with an expectation that face to face contact , applying the social distancing rules, will be significantly scaled up over the next 2-3 weeks.

The allocated social workers for 'our children' are having regular contact with children deploying technology to assist in understanding risk and need. Increasingly, contact with children and their families is face to face; with our sampling of records indicating that as many as 70 % of contacts are now face to face. The service is committed to protecting the gains drawn from more agile forms of working and the use of technology

- 6.7 The Directorate is anticipating new demand through increased vulnerability in the community due to the repercussions of Covid-19. It is likely demand areas will be based on family poverty, domestic violence, substance misuse, behavioural issues, mental health issues and family breakdown. As such the service is preparing for both a spike in demand for service, based on historical demand data and given the nature of the impact of COVID 19, increasing vulnerability, will result in an ongoing and sustained rise in request for service.

- 6.8 The services strapline during the COVID pandemic has been "business as usual" but doing it differently has resulted in the service maintaining its strong

performance and its commitment to ensuring the children of MAnchester live happy, health safe and successful lives

## **7.0 Recommendations**

- 7.1 Children and Young People's Scrutiny committee are asked to recognise the work that has taken place to date to enable most schools to remain open and operate safely since March 2020 and to support the steps being taken to ensure that schools can open to all pupils in September. In particular members are asked to reinforce the message that school is compulsory in September within their communities. A frequently asked questions document for parents/carers is attached to this paper to support this.