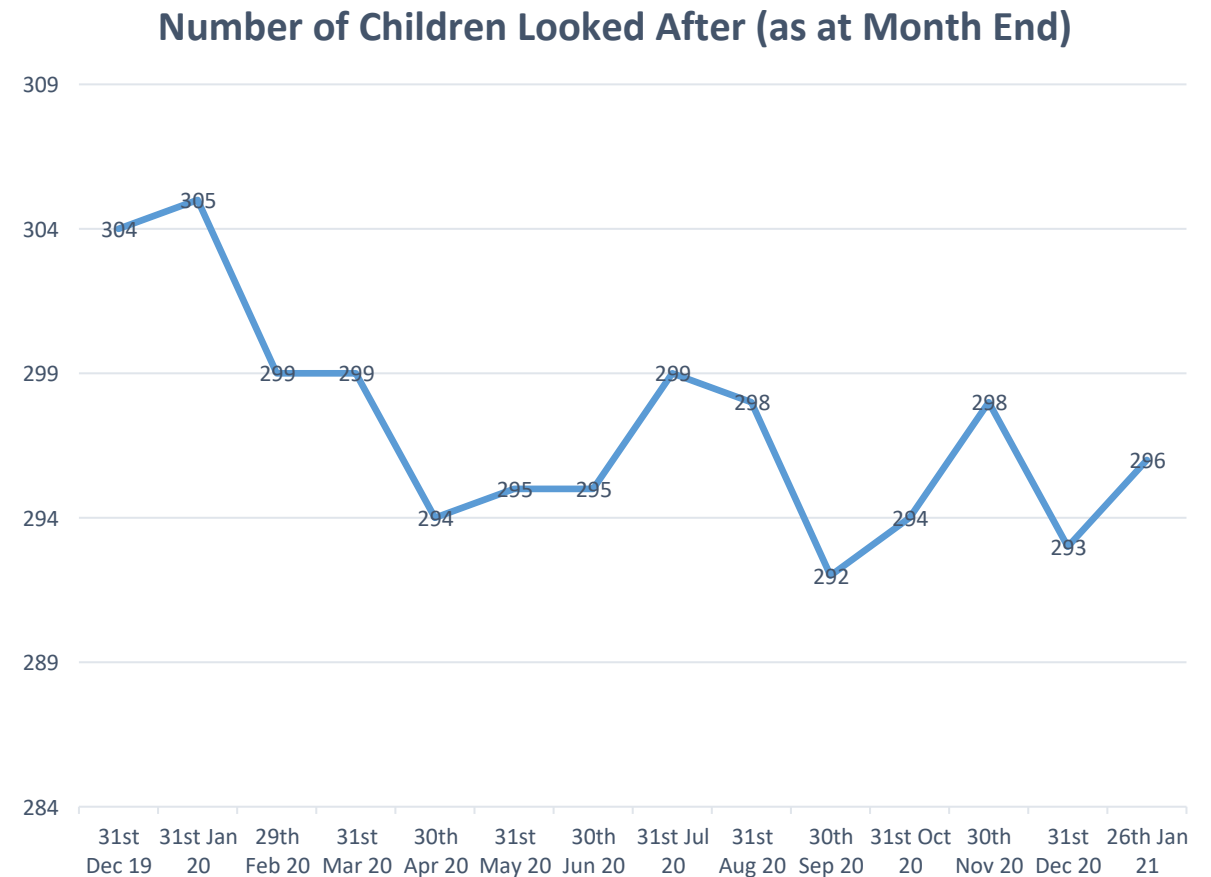


Covid Update Children's Services

January 2021

Fostering Team, Looked After Children and Leaving Care. Link with Western Bay Adoption Service. Pendarvis Contact Centre. Children with Disability and Lead for Autism

- We have maintained our processes of gatekeeping in respect of Admissions in to care. Admissions Panel and Legal Gateway Meetings continue to be chaired by Head of Service during this time.
- Despite the continued unique pressures we have been able to continue to balance the need for children coming into care with reviewing the changes of care plans for children already looked after.
- As the statistics show there has not been a great difference in the numbers as we have been able to maintain business as usual. The current number of looked after children in Neath Port Talbot as of the 26th January 2021 is 296.
- We have continued with fortnightly meetings to review the long term care plans of looked after children, and applications have been issued in respect of discharge of Care Orders for children living at home (subject to Placement with Parents Regulations), and also discharges of Care Orders in favour of Special Guardianship Orders. Some of the hearings have been delayed given that the Court have prioritised emergency applications.



Fostering Team, Looked After Children and Leaving Care. Link with Western Bay Adoption Service. Pendarvis Contact Centre. Children with Disability and Lead for Autism

Complex Needs

- We have also continued with our monthly Complex Needs panel which includes our partners from health and education. NPT's complex needs panel has previously focused only on looked after children. As a panel we have decided to widen the remit to consider and discuss all children and young people that have complex needs and a complex care plan.
- This meeting has strengthened the transition arrangements between children and adults social care by identifying young people who are likely to require a service from adult services at an early point, focusing on their outcomes and support needs.
- There is a regional programme of work to focus on complex needs including a focus on transition, safer accommodation and partnership working.

Fostering Team, Looked After Children and Leaving Care. Link with Western Bay Adoption Service. Pendarvis Contact Centre. Children with Disability and Lead for Autism

Supporting our Looked After Children

- We have found that virtual communication has worked well for some of our children and young people, particularly the older ones who have actually engaged more with this form of communication. We are therefore keen to continue to use this as one of the means of communication going forward.
- We have had increased contact with our looked after children during this time. We will again work closely with our partners in education to support children and young people, who will again find the return to school difficult after being off for a further extended period of time.
- The in-house Therapeutic team along with Multi Agency Placement Support Service (MAPSS) team continue to provide support to our looked after children / young people and also to their carers.
- In respect of family time, face to face contact has been promoted provided that there is a comprehensive risk assessment in place and that each case is considered on an individual basis as per the most recent Welsh Government Guidance.

Fostering Team, Looked After Children and Leaving Care. Link with Western Bay Adoption Service. Pendarvis Contact Centre. Children with Disability and Lead for Autism

Supporting our fostering Service

- We have ensured that our foster carers (mainstream and relative) have been provided with support at an increased level when required. The therapeutic team have also provided additional support during this time.
- Meetings are held on a daily basis with the Placements Officer and the Monitoring Officer to monitor the children in residential provisions and also in Independent Fostering Agency placements to ensure stability.
- As the lead for Looked After Children, I represent Children's Services on the weekly Regional Externally Commissioned Care Homes group and also on the Regional PPE meetings.
- Our recruitment campaign this year will include sharing the outcomes of our care leavers. Work has commenced on a regional basis to consider the recruitment of foster carers / supported lodgings providers for our children and young people with complex needs.
- Work has commenced in respect of a developing a digital means in which all foster carers can submit their recordings. Fostering Panel has continued – this is currently held virtually through Microsoft Teams.

Fostering Team, Looked After Children and Leaving Care. Link with Western Bay Adoption Service. Pendarvis Contact Centre. Children with Disability and Lead for Autism

Supporting our Care Leavers

- We have ensured that all our care leavers have access to food supplies and means of contacting someone (by providing phone credit, access to WIFI). Emotional, practical and financial help has been put in place when needed.
- We have also supported by extending WIR placements, providing foster care placements when needed, and also continued to provide both emotional and financial support to our care leavers at University placements. We have ensured that our Care Leavers have been provided with the most up to date information from Public Health Wales.

Fostering Team, Looked After Children and Leaving Care. Link with Western Bay Adoption Service. Pendarvis Contact Centre. Children with Disability and Lead for Autism

Youth Homelessness

- A working group have met to consider how we best support young people who find themselves in a homelessness situation.
- The process of how to assess and support young people has been updated and developed with the aim of achieving better outcomes. The work has also focused on further developing working relationships with our partner agencies, including Housing, Welfare Rights, Adult Services and housing providers.

Safeguarding

- The LA continues to convene two multi-agency forums that continue to sit bi-weekly to consider matters arising during this ever continuing period of uncertainty. As the meeting is multi-agency it allows for information to be regularly shared to keep abreast of any issues across NPT; for the most vulnerable children and adults to be monitored (via a spreadsheet); and as a means of connecting partners.
- Senior Managers continue to meet weekly to oversee and respond to matters of vulnerability and of a safeguarding nature.
- Recognising the importance of workforce resilience the LA authority partnered with Research in Practice (RiP) to assess the extent to which organisational factors and conditions support the wellbeing of their staff and promote optimum social work practice. The research involved staff from across children and adult services and the results, of which were broadly positive, were received before the Christmas break. Work will now be undertaken through the Quality Practice and Learning Group and Senior Management to analyse and respond to the areas identified to improve organisational resilience.
- In addition to the above the LA has sought feedback from practitioners and partner agencies, through the NPT Quality Practice & Learning Group, to learn lessons from the Pandemic to date. The learning will continue to inform our response to further outbreaks.
- Audits and Lessons Learning continue to be under taken across Children's and Adult Services to review the LA response during this pandemic i.e. the vulnerable list, assessments and decision-making, near-misses etc.

Safeguarding

- The Local Authority has developed and now published a web-page to support the emotional well-being and mental health of children and young people across NPT. This web-page receives the most hits of any of the LA web pages and a similar web-page is currently being developed for those over 18.
- The Safeguarding Board and its constituent parts (sub-groups) continue to meet and with each positioned, in line with the Annual Plan (2020/21), to respond to matters as they arise for the duration of the Pandemic.
- Applications for Deprivation of Liberty (DOLS) continue to be prioritised i.e. Form 1 (Urgent and Standard) over Review (Pre-existing DOLS in-situ).

What next?

- From a safeguarding perspective little has changed, in so far the response to CP or AAR concerns is the same. Our Care and Support, CP and AAR cases remain stable across the service, which provides the LA with some capacity to absorb potential increases in referrals or a reduction in the workforce through illness. As a Local Authority we remain in an adaptive phase and anticipate this to be the case for some time into 2021.

Safeguarding

- Referrals continue to be monitored for patterns and trends to determine response. These have returned to a 'normal' level, comparable to previous years across both Child Protection and Adult at Risk. DVA continues to be the most prevalent risk factor in referrals/reports, assessments and for Case Conferences. A working group will be set up in 2021 to evaluate and revise our response to DVA.
- The LA will be providing computer tablets to allow children and families have every opportunity to participate on Case Conferences, Core Groups and Court etc. for those that do not have access to the internet or hardware in the home.
- As of the 4th of December 2020 the Principal Officer (PO) for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance (QA) has been seconded to Hillside as Interim Principal Manager. All matters of an Operational Safeguarding nature have passed over to: Nune Aleksanyan (Children) & Adrian Bradshaw (Adults). All Strategic Safeguarding matters remain with the PO for Safeguarding, including QA.
- Given these uncertain times the Local Authority, for those arrangements noted above, is in the best possible position to identify and respond to matters arising across safeguarding: child and adult. In addition to this the Local Authority is at the table with colleagues regionally and nationally i.e. West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board; All Wales Safeguarding Leads Children and Adult; Welsh Government Adolescent and Extra-Familial Harm and Exploitation Group; LADO network; SCH Network; Partnership Meeting (YCS, CIW, WG, Children's Commissioner) in a bid to keep abreast of developments and best practice to respond to matters arising. On a final note, next steps will ultimately be determined and responded to fluidly and dynamically and in parallel with various guidance on local measures.

Youth Justice & Early Intervention Service (YJEIS)

- COVID struck as we were trying to move out of an unsatisfactory inspection, and work through a mandatory Inspection action and improvement plan. I am pleased to report that we are no longer considered an area of concern and are no longer subject to YJB monitoring other than the monitoring which is commensurate with any other Youth Justice service in Wales. We have not been re-inspected, but the YJB have reported back to HMIP that we have improved enough over a sustained period to revert back to this status. This is down to the commitment of senior management and staff post disaggregation from the regional service. As a direct result of this improvement journey we have been awarded 10k to produce a governance pathway for the YJB. We are confident that when we are re-inspected that these improvements will be evident.

The areas addressed include:

- Safeguarding
- Managing vulnerable children alongside Children Services. (Using RAG ratings and working closely with Team managers to assess and monitor risk)
- Statutory Interventions
- Risk of Serious Harm (ROSH)
- Asset plus assessments
- Home Visits
- Interventions
- Bureau and out of court disposals.

Youth Justice & Early Intervention Service (YJEIS)

- Appropriate adult attendance
- Court and custody.
- ISS (Intensive support and surveillance)
- Pre-sentence reports
- Staff safety and wellbeing including PPE
- Home working technology.
- Virtual statutory Management Board
- Virtual risk planning meetings
- Virtual Panel.
- Virtual Bureau.
- Education for Our young people

Youth Justice & Early Intervention Service (YJEIS)

Road map out of lockdown

- As lockdown measures relaxed, the Local Authority and the YJEIS moved into an adaptive and transitional phase. This involved pace, planning and provision of some resumed pre -lockdown services. We re- entered lockdown recently so had to revert to the original COVID contingency plan. Going forward we will take what we need from both the contingency and recovery plans and adapt as necessary.
- Understanding what is needed, will be the key component and work with multiagency partners in the YJEIS will be critical for success. As in lockdown, the picture is ever changing as we try to emerge from it, and the need for communication and information as the status quo changes will be critical.
- Priority areas for the YJEIS will be the reduction and management of offending behaviour, substance abuse, county lines, violence against the person and violent crimes. Education and employment training has re- started emerge as businesses and colleges and schools re opened.
- From a safeguarding and exploitation perspective, on line abuse / grooming, Criminal and sexual exploitation will feature high on the agenda and linking in with contextualised risk panel will be important to monitor and assess risk. The quarterly YJEIS safeguarding report is embedded in this report.
- Early intervention and prevention services have been resumed in line with recovery, and the new Resource Centre has been identified, a plan of works drawn up and partial funding granted. We are awaiting further sign off of ICF monies. This will be a joint collaboration with Children Services and a resource for all children and families to access where both safe deemed and appropriate. As a service, this is one area that will really support the rolling needs of the local lockdown challenges, and provide safe open and child focused and child centred accommodation for assessments and family time going forward.

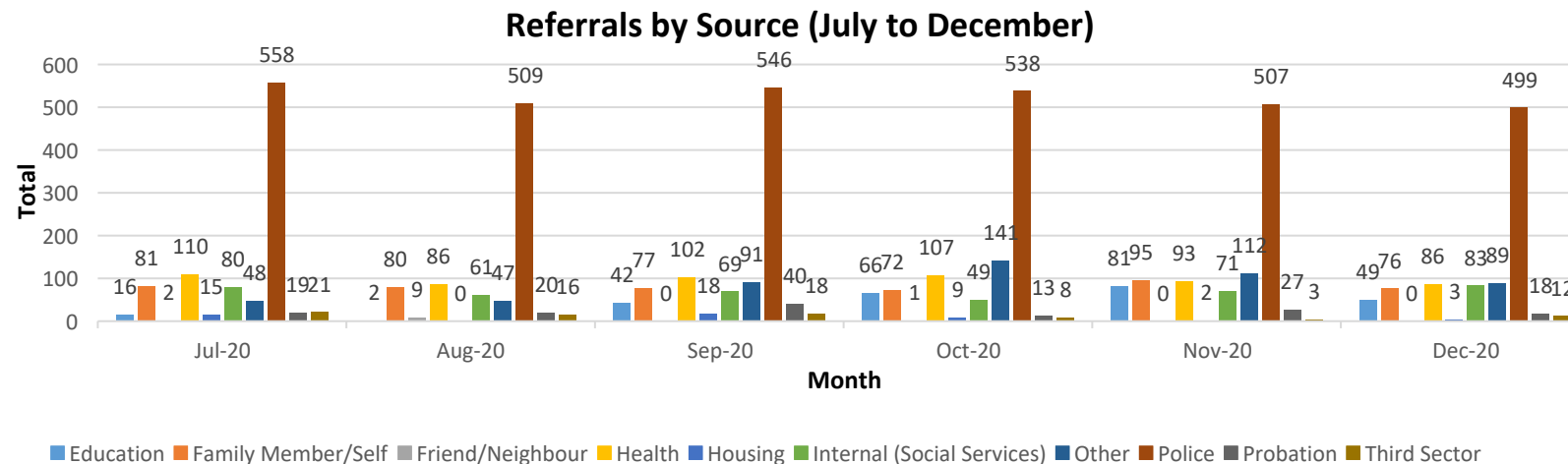
Adults and Children's Single Point of Contact (SPOC), Team Around the Family (TAF & Safeguarding (as of 4th December 2020)

- Our Adults and Children's SPOC team continue to support the most vulnerable in our communities to ensure they are protected from harm. COVID has placed significant pressures on the team as they continued to offer support and operate as much of a "business as usual" model as possible.
- Given the pressures faced in SPOC, staffing arrangements have been bolstered to ensure we can meet the demand placed on our front door teams. We now find ourselves in a stronger position at this current time. We continue to balance virtual working, wherever possible, with face to face visits to ensure we are meeting our safeguarding responsibilities.
- Throughout the pandemic, Team Around the Family have continued to offer virtual support to our families, as one of the few EIP services that continued to operate throughout the pandemic this was crucial. Since September they have started to undertake a limited amount of visits, with the appropriate PPE, to families where concerns are escalating and without a more direct service are at risk of requiring a statutory intervention. This has been especially important as most other EIP services continue to only offer limited support, which is mainly on a virtual platform.
- The emotional health and wellbeing of our young people and their families continues to be at the forefront of our minds; families are experiencing fatigue from the ongoing lockdown arrangements and this is evident in the referrals that are being received. As such, there are close working relationships established with Education to ensure the right services and support are delivered to children of all ages.
- Domestic abuse continues to be the leading cause of referrals into the service. There is a task and finish group set up through the VAWDA Leadership Group to consider the services available around domestic abuse and to ensure that referrals are being made appropriately and as early as possible for families

Adults and Children’s Single Point of Contact (SPOC), Team Around the Family (TAF & Safeguarding (as of 4th December 2020)

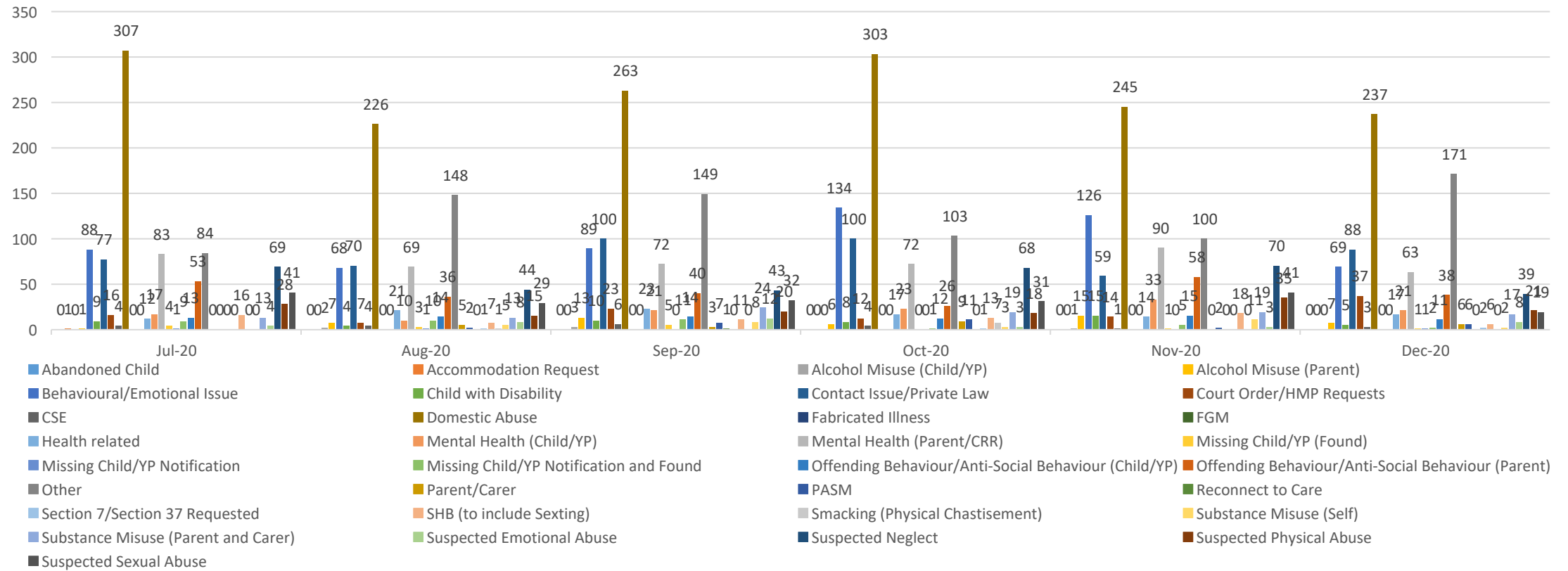
The tables below shows data updated trends in referral rates, sources and reasons for referrals.

Total Number of Contacts/Referrals Received	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20
Total	1139	894	1049	1220	1219	1049



Adults and Children's Single Point of Contact (SPOC), Team Around the Family (TAF & Safeguarding (as of 4th December 2020)

Referrals by Reason (July to December 2020)



Community Children's Teams

- **Continued monitoring of the safeguarding of children / young people as per RAG list** the list is continuously reviewed and updated by the team managers. These children are our most vulnerable and the majority would be subject to a child protection plan. We continue to undertake Section 47 enquiries face to face. Some of the amber and green visits have been visited when necessary to provide support to our families. In light of the new lockdown measures, families that can be visited remotely are currently under those arrangements, however, if there are safeguarding concerns the children are placed in the red category.
- **Ensuring that families continue to spend time with one another safely.** Social workers have risk assessed all looked after children requiring family time with family members. We have opened some rooms within the county so that family time can take place safely. All risk assessments are agreed with the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and are signed off by the respective Principal Officers. All rooms are cleaned after use and PPE is used when needed. These arrangements are reviewed fortnightly in line with Public Wales guidance through a COVID/ next steps meeting with senior managers contact manager and Health and safety officer.
- **Ongoing care proceedings** In general the courts have continued to operate and proceedings have been undertaken virtually. Rooms within the county have been made available for those families that cannot be assessed remotely. PPE is given when needed and rooms are cleaned following use. All assessments are considered by a panel of principal officers. As Principal Officer for the judiciary I attend the Local Family Justice board as well as the Wales family justice board.
- **Supervision and support during hospital births** We continue to work closely with midwifery to provide supervision and support to Mother and babies during births. We have needed to balance the risk posed to the Mother and baby in respect to safeguarding to the risk re covid 19. PPE has been sought midwifery have been pleased with support provided. Work is now being undertaken to strengthen these arrangements due to an evident need for a cohort of staff to regularly supervise Mother and babies during birth. Work is also being undertaken to strengthen Public Law Outline (PLO) arrangements to ensure a consistent approach for families as well as support for families during the PLO process,

Community Children's Teams

- **Oversight of work.** Principal Officer continues to meet with team managers on a weekly basis to check in during lockdown. The Principal Officer visits the teams virtually on a monthly basis. Supervisions have continued as usual. Monitoring reports are used on a fortnightly basis to check the activity on cases. While there has been a general feeling of being very busy in the community teams, managers have continued to manage caseloads and support for each other during sickness
- **Multi Agency Placement Support Service (MAPSS) (therapeutic service to support complex children who are Looked After).** MAPSS is a regional service, the model aims to train foster carers, and social workers on therapeutic approaches to support looked after children. MAPSS have been supporting Swansea and NPT locally, however, they are now looking at getting back together as a team to support our most complex looked after children to produce better outcomes for children. MAPSS have reformed as a team and there is a weekly Principal Officer Panel to ensure that the most complex children are being supported and to avoid drift.
- **The Consultant Social Workers.** The Consultant Social workers continue to drive best practice throughout the authority by meeting as a group on a monthly basis and developing a plan to improve practice. They also mentor and support less experienced members within their teams. There is now a full time Outcome focussed practice consultant social worker who is working closely with social care wales to further develop outcome focussed practice within the authority and to partner agencies. NPT are supporting social care wales to drive this practice throughout Wales.
- **Oversight of PLO and Court proceedings.** Principal Officer continues to meet with CAFCASS and attend the Local Family Justice Board (LFJB), so that NPT have a consistent approach to court as surrounding Local Authorities. There has been some delay in final hearing due to social worker's unable to complete assessments without face to face assessments and observation sessions. The courts have understood the position of the Local Authority. However, we have now opened buildings for such assessments to take place, so there will be no more delay, unless Government guidance changes in this area. Court proceedings have taken place remotely, which has worked generally well but with some technical issues that have needed attention.

Family Action Support Team, Working Together Service, Integrated Family Support Service, Emergency Duty Team

Critical Activities that needed to be addressed

- To continue with the services above, with regular review to take into account any issues relating to COVID-19 and local lockdowns
- To train more staff in Domestic Abuse and Non Violent Resistance training to support children and parents. To train and deliver an accredited parenting programme.
- To Risk assess the issue of transportation to better assist children and families.
- To train the Team in the ACES recovery toolkit (Rockpool).
- For Resource panel will continue to be run weekly to allow case managers to get the maximum support needed.
- To develop a Team to support mothers and their children in hospital who require 24/7 support .

Family Action Support Team, Working Together Service, Integrated Family Support Service, Emergency Duty Team

- How were they addressed?
- We have continued to hold weekly Resource Panel meetings with multi-agencies to provide the best support, from the most appropriate services, at the right time.
- All staff have now been trained to deliver the CEASER programme. (Children Experiencing Adversity, Supporting Emotional Resilience).
- Around 30% of the staff are now trained to deliver the Supportive Parents programme (What is a healthy/unhealthy relationship, Top ten parenting tips, Child centred parenting and Parenting beliefs)
- All staff will receive training in an accredited parenting programme on the 3rd and 4th of March this year.
- NVR training will be delivered following the parenting (NUTURE) programme.
- Rockpool training (ACES) is also due to be delivered in March 2020.
- Staff are now providing transport in critical cases, and there is a risk assessment in place.
- We have developed a new 'Hospital' Team, who are able to respond to the needs of supervision for mothers and babies. This is a strong Team, who are dedicated to the role.

Family Action Support Team, Working Together Service, Integrated Family Support Service, Emergency Duty Team

• What next?

- We will continue with the services above, with regular review to take into account any issues relating to COVID-19 and local lockdowns
- We will look to work with Well-Being through the use of additional funds providing programmes of work for children, young people and their families.
- We are looking to utilise space at the 'Resource Centre' so that more face to face sessions can be undertaken safely.
- We will look to strengthen our 'Positive Steps' programme
- We will look to support and develop individuals learning needs and development within the team.

APPENDIX A (Opposite)

- Support provided from 1st October 2020 – 31st December 2020

SERVICE	NUMER OF FAMLIES/REFERRALS
PARENTING	48
PARENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES	8
POSITIVE STEPS	10
RAPID RESPONSE	90
RESPECT PROGRAMME	6
REUNIFICATION	12
STAR (PARENTS AND CHILD)	30
STAR (CHILD)	84
SUPPORTIVE PARENTS	34
WORKING TOGETHER SERVICE	25
TOTAL	347