**Child Protection Conference Service Response to Coronavirus - 18 March 2020**This short paper aims to outline the risks to the CP conference system and to outline how the service will complete its job of overseeing the work of the core group while safeguarding all conference attendees from increased spread of the virus. These arrangements will also increase the resource to support broader Trust responsibilities as the pandemic develops.  
 **Risks to and associated with Child Protection Conferences.**(Based on estimates that 60 – 80% people in the population will become infected, with the peak arriving in the next 2 – 4 weeks).  
  
1. CP Conferences are multi-agency meetings involving families. As such, there can be up to 15 people in the room and therefore the risk of transmission of COVID19 could be increased.   
  
2. CP Conferences are attended by professionals whose services will also come under increased pressure e.g. Police, all health professionals and schools as well as third sector agencies. Therefore, it is likely that there will be decreased resource to attend conference and perhaps agencies will only be able to provide the provision of a small team to respond to BCT issues remotely.  
  
3. The CP chair group is a small one (12) with a broad area of responsibility across the Trust and so the service is vulnerable should team members become infected/ self-isolating. We already have staff either self-isolating or becoming increasingly concerned about being in conference.   
  
4. The minute taking service is already under pressure with long-term sickness and 3 staff already self-isolating as from today. This will mean meetings are not professionally minuted and will place further pressure on chairs.  
  
5. The area social work service will come under increasing pressure and it is likely that workers’ time will be directed at the most vital tasks such as seeing children or completing assessments rather than writing reports for conferences.  
  
6. Schools are already giving apologies for conferences, referring to their own procedures and guidance around the virus. This is having an impact on quoracy already and this will certainly increase in coming days/ weeks.  
  
7. It is likely that schools will close meaning that staff may not be available to attend meetings.  
  
8. Many of the families we work with have increased vulnerabilities including poor nutrition, underlying health conditions and poverty as well as issues of domestic abuse (isolation = increased risk), alcohol and substance misuse. By the very fact that the children have a CP plan, there are significant concerns about their parenting ability. Being at home, isolated with their children without enough money or perhaps enough supplies, could put children further at risk of harm.  
  
9. The main aim of the Strengthening Families conference format is to work with families in a respectful and honest way. The conference is an important forum in which to work with parents, helping them to understand professional concerns. Parents will be unable to attend conference should their children be home from school and nursery and perhaps being without safe, alternative childcare. Parents often report feeling frightened of the outcome of conference and may feel they need to attend even if unwell.  
  
**Temporary arrangements**  
The purpose of the CP conference system is to ensure that each child deemed at serious risk of significant harm has a comprehensive CP plan, including a safety plan as well as a core group of family and professionals working together to improve safety for the children. Then the conference must review the work of the core group in implementing that plan, recording progress and amendments to the plan.   
  
The CP conference is a shared forum to enable all involved to openly discuss the concerns and to challenge each other, ensuring the correct level of service is offered. This is a very important service, but it should not be the vehicle for immediate decision-making about individual children’s safety – that is done by the area social work service.   
  
The temporary changes we will institute will enable the CP service staff to review the arrangements for individual children and also to be available to offer support and assistance to the area social work service by helping with visits to the most vulnerable children and young people and to act as CP advisor to inquorate strategy meetings if invited to do so.  
The CP service will strive to maintain oversight of children’s situations and progress of plans without formal multi-agency meetings with all their inherent risks of cross infection. This will, together with area social work services, identify those children most at risk enabling visiting arrangements to be agreed.   
 **Review Conferences**  
  
In the short term, Review Conferences will be managed by CP Chairs making arrangements to have an overview of the child’s situation in communication with the area team manager, families and, where possible, involved professionals.This will not involve a physical meeting for all the reasons set out above. I propose that these arrangements start from Monday 23rd March2020 and run until the urgent phase of the pandemic is over. This arrangement will be reviewed regularly with senior managers from the Trust and partner agencies.   
There is clear guidance for CP Chairs on how this is to be achieved in a coherent, consistent and clearly recorded way. (Appendix A).The CP Chairs will determine whether, considering the changing situation regarding COVID19, the plans in place to safeguard the child are adequate and indeed possible e.g. children whose safety plan involves being seen daily in school or nursery.

Although there will not be a formal meeting, all CP Chairs have access to the use of Skype, Email (Netmotion) and mobile telephone and will:

* read all relevant documents including case notes, previous minutes, CP plan, reports and core group minutes
* have a telephone discussion with the Team Manager for the children and with the SW if needed to
* discuss progress of the plan and to decide on the level of vulnerability and action needed to best help the family.
* have a telephone discussion with parents/ children to gain their views on the progress of the plan and action needed to best help their family.
* have a telephone discussion with available professionals to discuss progress of the plan and to decide on the level of vulnerability and action needed to best help the family.
* record clearly on a case note on Eclipse the discussion contents and the rationale for any decision made.
* Update plans and complete brief minutes based on the work above.

**Informing people of the changed arrangements.**   
  
The information on immediate arrangements for CP conferences have been agreed at senior management level and communicated to: -

* Chairs
* BCT Senior Management Team
* Area Heads of Service for distribution to all social work staff
* Birmingham Children’s Safeguarding Partnership
* Safeguarding Leads in all partner agencies.
* BCT Comms

With regard to individual conferences, this service will take responsibility for ensuring attendees, especially families, are informed that conferences will not go ahead in the usual format. This will be done with collaboration and sometimes support from area social work colleagues. There will be standard explanatory letters and phone calls will made as necessary. (Appendix 2).  
  
**Initial Conferences**

Initial CP Conferences will be prioritised as the children involved, whilst they should have an immediate safety plan, do not yet have a detailed Child Protection Plan. From 23.3.20, these meetings will take place in the same way as conferences described above. The Chair will discuss with participants, use written reports, spider phone and mobile phone conversations or skype and make a professional decision regarding about listing writing, if needed, a CP or CIN Plan.

**Conclusion.**   
  
The CP conference service is an important but not urgent service. For the reasons outlined above there will be considerable short-term disruption to the conferences themselves but the arrangements cover the essential tasks of the service to provide independent oversight and clear assessment of levels of concern.   
  
At this time of unprecedented stress on public services and increased anxiety and vigilance among the population, it is necessary that all resources are directed to the most vulnerable families in the most effective manner. The CP Chairs will be available to help in other service areas which need to be prioritised including visits to vulnerable families, help at Strategy Discussions, help completing assessments and visits to vulnerable care leavers in unsupported accommodation.   
  
If anyone is unclear or concerned about the arrangements, the CP management team can be contact via Central Requests mailbox, email or by calling 0212 303 7557.  
  
  
Judith Beddow - Head of Service Safeguarding (Child Protection) 16.3.2020

**ENDS**

**Risk to and associated with CIC Reviews**

(Based on estimates that 60 – 80% people in the population will become infected, over a potential period of 12 to 14 weeks).

1. CIC reviews are face to face meetings involving children, adults of varying ages, both carers, parents and various professionals. As such, there will be a number of people in the room, who have arrived from various settings and therefore the risk of transmission of COVID19 could be increased. Current Government Guidance recommends reducing social contact to support reducing risk of transmission.  
  
2. CIC reviews take place at various venues including homes, foster placements, residential placements, schools, and children’s trust offices and we are finding that venues where children live are increasingly wishing to limit visitors to the settings to prevent the transmission of Covid 19, so suitable venues for meetings are currently becoming less or not appropriate

3. CIC reviews are attended by professionals whose services will also come under increased pressure e.g. social work practitioners and schools as well as third sector agencies. Therefore, it is likely that there will be decreased resource to attend and participate in review meetings  
  
4. The IRO team has a broad area of responsibility across the Trust and so the service is vulnerable should team members become infected/ self-isolating. We already have staff either self-isolating or becoming increasingly concerned about travel and meetings, with a high percentage of the team with vulnerable health conditions.   
  
5. The area social work service will come under increasing pressure and it is likely that workers’ time will be directed at the most vital tasks such as seeing children, within the Trust’s priority areas of children at risk of safeguarding concerns in the community or completing assessments rather than having capacity to focus on reviewing of children in care

6. Overall the capacity to enable reviews to take place as face to face meetings, with availability of key individuals with increased health risks for all involved will clearly impact the need for reviews to not take place as face to face meetings in the venues where usually they happen, compounded by potentially less availability of both carers, children and young people and social work and other professionals to be available due to absence, and expected self-isolation, and reducing risk of exposure to Covid 19 for all participants in the traditional way reviews have taken place.

**Temporary Arrangements**

The purpose of the IRO function and CIC Reviews is to ensure that each child in care has a care and permanence plan that meets their needs, and the review enables scrutiny of the plan and forms the basis of how the IRO for each child undertakes their function to provide independent oversight of the child’s care plan, as well as ensure that the child’s views have been suitably considered in the making and outcomes of their care plan  
  
The CIC review is a forum to enable all involved to openly discuss the care plan and arrangements, ensuring the care plan meets the child’s needs. This is a very important service, but it should not be the vehicle for the establishing of the care plan for the child – that is done by the area social work service.   
  
The temporary changes we will institute will enable IROs to review the arrangements for individual children and undertake due functions of the IRO to monitor the Trusts functions to the children in care.  
 **The IRO service will continue to strive to maintain oversight of children in care situations and progress of plans without the specific need to hold face to face review meetings with all their inherent risks of cross infection. This will, together with area social work services, identifying those children who are at risk and require greater input to support their wellbeing at this time.**  
  
**Child in Care Reviews**

CIC Reviews will be managed by IROs making arrangements to have an overview of the child’s situation in communication with the area team manager and social worker, carers, parents as applicable, children and young people and, where possible, involved professionals. **The general assumption that in this period the review will not likely involve a physical meeting for all the reasons set out above. I propose that these arrangements start from Monday 23rd March 2020 and run until the urgent phase of the pandemic is over. This arrangement will be reviewed regularly with senior managers from the Trust and partner agency as necessary**There is below clear guidance on how this is to be achieved in a coherent, consistent and clearly recorded way. The IRO for each child will determine whether, considering the changing situation regarding COVID19, the care plan for the child is suitable and indeed possible.  
  
Although there will not likely to be a formal face to face meeting, all IROs have access to the use of Skype, Email, Microsoft team and mobile telephone to communicate with key individuals

* In preparation for the review the IRO will need to be in contact with all participants as early as possible
* The IRO will determine in the preparation for the review with the child’s social worker and child and young person how the above communication tools will be used, or if a face to face meeting can be possible
* The review will be conducted as required but through remote communication methods agreed including
* read all relevant documents
* Undertake due functions of the review including, reviewing permanence plan, legal status, child’s placement, health development and identity, emotional wellbeing, education and learning, family relationships, and pathway plan as applicable, through communication with participants
* Ensure across the review process the IRO has spoken with all key participants
* IRO will produce a review record – this will include clearly stated method of how review was conducted.

IROs will be mindful of risk assessments already undertaken in respect of reviews and needs of the children concerned to prioritise reviews taking place

**Informing People of the Changed Arrangements.**   
  
The information on immediate arrangements for CIC Reviews have been agreed at senior management level and communicated to: -   
IROs,  
BCT Senior Management Team  
Area Heads of Service (and Fostering and Adoption) for distribution to all social work staff

**Conclusion.**   
  
The IRO service is an important but not urgent service for BCT’s children in care. For the reasons outlined above there will be considerable short-term disruption to the review meetings themselves but the arrangements cover the essential tasks of the service to provide independent oversight of care planning for children in care.   
  
At this time of unprecedented stress on public services and increased anxiety and vigilance among the population, it is necessary that all resources are directed to the most vulnerable families in the most effective manner. The IROs will be available to provide support as required to the Trust in meeting the needs of our children and young people   
  
If anyone is unclear or concerned about the arrangements, the IRO Management Team can be contact via Central IRO Service email [centraliroservice@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk](mailto:centraliroservice@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk) .  
  
Paul Nash

**IRO Head of Service**

**18/03/2020**