

Report to Buckden Parish Council, May 12th, 2020

1. The County Council has been heavily involved in mitigating the worst effects of the virus, especially in relation to looking after older people and children in need. I think the staff have been showing great resilience and determination in the face of unprecedented circumstances. There was initially some overlap and confusion between what each layer of local government has been doing, especially in relation to the identification of the most vulnerable but I think that has now settled down. I have been forwarding the 'shielded residents' list' to Elaine Scott.

2. The Director of Children's Services provided this report on April 24th:

- a. Our programme of prioritised face to face visiting to most vulnerable children and young people continues;*
- b. Other visiting taking place virtually using social media;*
- c. Some visiting is taking place less frequently than previously where this is proportionate;*
- d. Links between early help services and community hubs established;*
- e. Schools continuing to offer excellent support to children who are vulnerable and those of key workers;*

Low rates of referrals of children continue, as is the case nationally and regionally;

Low numbers of vulnerable children accessing school places despite best efforts, as is the case nationally and regionally. Mitigation for both includes asking safeguarding board and community hubs to ensure they are referring on as needed.

Likely to be a significant increase in referrals once services begin to return to normal and children are being seen by universal services;

For the longer term, the risks are that there is a shortage of Independent Fostering Agency placements as demand returns to usual levels, which may result in greater use of residential placements;

There is also a risk that any spike in demand resulting from more children being referred after the lockdown period ends may require additional temporary staff.

Schools have been staying open for the children of key workers but the up-take has been less than expected and it is not yet clear when schools will re-open fully. The voucher scheme for giving financial food support has been inconsistent.

3. It is too early to say what the long-term financial implications for the County Council will be. The government has made extra money available to local councils and although these sums sound large at national level (e.g. £1.6 billion), by the time they get down to front-line services they may not be adequate. The sum allocated from the government to CCC worked out at just over £14 million. More has been added in the last couple of days.
4. Meetings of councillors and officers continue to take place via Zoom so, as far as possible, the routine work carries on but inevitably more slowly.
5. It has been heartening to see the way in which local communities have rallied round to help those in greatest need. Sometimes that has been organised via a parish council; in other cases self-help groups have sprung up independently.
6. When this crisis is over, not too long we hope, there will need to be a serious discussion at all levels of government, from Westminster through to parish councils about what we will need to do differently in future. Our society will face profound challenges and opportunities. Those who make a commitment to serving the community as elected councillors will have a major role to play

Peter Downes, May 5th 2020