



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

COVID-19

Birmingham City Council

Providing Early Help for Children and Families

To identify vulnerable families that were struggling and provide a range of local support for them during the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic

Context

The Covid-19 pandemic has taken an enormous toll on all communities in Birmingham, but the greatest impact has been on the most vulnerable. Before the pandemic, Birmingham Children's Partnership (Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Children's Trust, West Midlands Police, Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group, Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Foundation Trust and Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust) had agreed a change programme for children and family services. As a result of the pandemic, these plans were accelerated to coordinate support from across the partnership remotely to support children, young people and their families.

Development

The Birmingham Children's partnership aimed to:

- Identify vulnerable families that were struggling and provide a range/menu of local support
- Coordinate support in localities with the voluntary, faith and community sectors, and GPs, schools and nurseries
- Provide online advice, guidance and counselling
- Reduce demand on acute services – ensuring families had somewhere else to go
- Model an early help offer for vulnerable families that could be built on once the Covid-19 emergency period was over.

Implementation

The Council developed a new locality structure for early help. The structure was built from the community with coordination by Birmingham Voluntary Service Council, 10 children's

charities leading each of the localities (districts), and 10 public sector leads. Activities included:

- Coordinating and supporting schools and nurseries contacting vulnerable families
- Holding regular partnership meetings to coordinate support and avoid duplication of effort
- Advising local partners of the early help and support they could access
- Helping the voluntary sector to connect to families
- Mapping and publishing available resources during the Covid-19 period
- Supporting the roll-out of food vouchers for all children on Free School Meals, Foodbanks, allocation of resilience funding and other support
- Agreeing and allocating community grants to local community, voluntary and faith groups.

The Council allocated grants for community, voluntary and faith groups who were supporting families during the Covid-19 period. £800,000 was available to support children and families, with an additional £500,000 available for vulnerable adults and further funding for older people. The process for allocation of community grants drew on the model and forms from the Neighbourhood Networks and Adult Social Care. The Council specifically wanted to encourage grassroots community groups to be at the forefront of the Covid-19 response. £1m of resilience funding was allocated to direct help for children, young people and families who required hardship support. Local professionals completed a simple form to apply for funding for supplies, food, fuel, medicines, white goods or internet access for a family. If applying before 3pm on weekdays, money was transferred to families within an hour. There was no wrong front door so it was acceptable for this grant to cross over with others, as long as recipients were receiving the payment only once. Approval and allocation of funds was undertaken centrally by a business support team, which cross-referred to other hardship funds to reduce the chance of fraud and duplication. There was close working with the Birmingham Children's Trust Resource Hub and the MK Community Foundation that is currently allocating support to young people. Online mental health support was also launched from Kooth. The service is available for 250,000 young people aged 11 to 25 and provides chat, moderated peer support, self-help guides and counselling. The service is funded by Birmingham City Council and commissioned by Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group.



Review

The Council developed a citywide database of families, which was built on a universal dataset by Birmingham Children's Trust. It was critical for correlating with local spreadsheets of children the Council were worried about, and identifying families who were falling through the gaps between early help services. A new government notification for sharing data between health and local authority partners supported the database, as well as existing SEND Collaborative Working data sharing agreement, Birmingham Children's Collaborative Working Information

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