

# Family Services

COVID-19 Family Services All About Me Recovery Strategy	
<b>Document Title</b>	<b>COVID-19 Family Services All About Me Recovery Strategy</b>
<b>Document description</b>	<p>This document sets out our strategic recovery priorities and intentions for service delivery as restrictions are eased and we enter a new operating model. Including what services and practice will be restored and what will be retained because of a positive impact during P1 business continuity practices. It sets out a 5-stage recovery plan for each service area within Family Services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Safeguarding</li><li>• Corporate Parenting</li><li>• 0-25 Disability Service</li><li>• Clinical Service</li><li>• Support Services and Commissioning</li><li>• Libraries</li><li>• Education and Partnerships</li><li>• Schools including early years setting, primary, secondary and special.</li></ul> <p>Family Friendly is a cross cutting council priority and recovery theme workstream. This strategy will cross reference to other recovery activity that fall within the workstream which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recovery of parks</li></ul> <p>To be read in conjunction with Family Services COVID-19 P1 Service Delivery, Business Continuity Plan and P2 Rota; Five-point recovery plans for each service area; and Greenspaces &amp; Leisure Recovery Programme (Green Spaces workstream) documentation.</p>
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Clearance Process	
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## Introduction

Children are at the centre of everything that we do and we continue a relentless focus on our “All about me” practice model and Family Friendly Council. The full impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are not yet known but emerging data from sources such as the ONS indicate a new “child poverty and mental health emergency” in the UK. This is emerging in Barnet, we are seeing an increase in anxiety related presentations to the BIC service and the KOOTH on line counselling service and the number of young people in education, employment, training. Families are facing increasing pressures due to a strain on finances, the stress of isolation and managing childcare demands alongside work commitments. Children are missing a significant part of their education and for some the vital safety net of going to school is no longer there and access to other activities and outdoor spaces has also been limited. This document sets out our strategic intentions to support children and families to flourish and for our services to deliver in a new state of “normal” within a family friendly council.

Everyone involved in promoting the welfare, protection and care of children and young people have worked extremely hard in the face of unprecedented challenges to support the most vulnerable during this period. Staff from across the service, and with our partners, have come together to deliver services in new and creative ways ensuring that universal and early help services remain operational with a continued focus on prevention and early intervention while continuing to safeguard our most vulnerable children and young people. That is why vulnerable children attending schools has increased from 13% at the beginning of lockdown to 42% (July 9<sup>th</sup>), which is in line with the national picture, and we are performing well or better across key indicators including timeliness of decisions, statutory visits and conferences. Placement capacity is stable meaning that we have continued to be able to respond to demand already in the system and COVID-19 related placement needs. Quality remains a critical focus and supervision levels are satisfactory, and for some teams improving, and management oversight remains robust.

Our library service has delivered an enhanced on-line digital offer while the buildings have been closed which has enabled access to a much wider range of online activities and learning materials than was available previously and has proved extremely successful. The library services, that are accessed via a building, will gradually resume in line with Government guidance and local appraisal of risk and resources.

We are now through the initial phase of managing the impact of the pandemic and our response to the social distancing measures, through the new ways of working, (COVID-19 P1 Service Delivery) are well embedded. We have not seen the severe impact on the workforce as predicted or the expected rise in demand across the system. However, we anticipate a spike in demand across the system as children begin to return to school and the economic impact starts to bite and this needs to be planned for. It is widely accepted that returning to normal is unlikely to happen, in the foreseeable future, and the fact that how things were may never be the same. This does not mean that things will not be good just different and in some ways improved, as there is agreement that some things have worked better and been more effective than before. We have moved through the immediate response to the crisis and have maintained service continuity and supported our most vulnerable. Planning to exit lock down and delivery of longer term ambitions for our Family Friendly council has begun. This strategy sets out how we will approach our Family Friendly recovery through the implementation of recovery plans for each service area and the delivery of a set of strategic intentions. The initial scope for this strategy focuses on the restoration of family services including schools, early years and libraries and the restoration of parks. Through the Green spaces & Leisure Recovery Programme. There is opportunity to bring in other parts of the council and partner services to deliver wider and longer-term ambitions to meet our strategic intentions.

## Restore, reinvent, retain

Not everything about how we have been working during this unprecedented time has been negative, indeed many things have worked better and some things less well. We want to capture that learning and retain the best of it while restoring what we can of what was good before. Across the council services are beginning to plan for recovery and an exercise was undertaken by each service to identify what practices they would Restore, Reinvent or Retain. Some of what we identified is consistent across the council such as reducing bureaucracy where we can, retaining home working, and creative use of technology to deliver services. The outputs of this exercise and some anecdotal feedback from staff have informed our strategic approach to recovery recognising that this will be an evolving picture that will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Any changes that we make will assess the risks and mitigations that are required. We will consider and align with the Government's recovery strategy as much as we can but will also be guided by local circumstances so that what we do is done at the right time, is fit for purpose and safe for our workforce and the children and families that we support. To that end each service area will have a 5-stage plan which sets out the services and practice that will be reintroduced to reach full restoration, notwithstanding that might be different to pre COVID delivery.

## Implementation, monitoring and reporting

The Children and Young People's Partnership Board remains the strategic body with responsibility for the delivery of Family Friendly across the Council and wider partnership. The partnership is responsible for ensuring that new policy, strategy and service developments are designed to deliver Family Friendly outcomes for e.g. The Local Plan.

We will deliver the Family Friendly corporate recovery priority through the recovery plans and delivery against our strategic priorities and recovery intentions set out in this document. Monitoring will be carried out by Family Service's SLT, which will act as the Family Friendly Recovery Steering Group. Family friendly priority is a specific strategic intention that cuts across all council business and the wider partnership. The leads for other workstreams that are in scope for delivering against this priority: Greenspaces workstream (Greenspaces & Leisure Recovery Programme) will provide an update and, as necessary, attend the steering group for discussion, monitoring and agreeing updates to the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and the Corporate Recovery Steering Group. Risks associated with delivery of the Family Service's Recovery Plans, and the Strategic Intentions will be added to the existing Family services risk register under Family Friendly risks and monitored through the SLT steering group. Risks associated with the Greenspaces workstream will be documented in the Greenspaces & Leisure Recovery Programme documentation, to avoid duplication, and shared with the Family Friendly Steering Group (SLT).

## Strategic Priorities

We have six strategic priorities:

- 1. Supporting children to return to school/learning**-missed time in school is a concerning not only because of the impact on educational outcomes and impact on future life chances but because of the protective factor that attending school provides for vulnerable children and those that need safeguarding.
- 2. Children's safeguarding remains the highest context**-Ensuring capacity to respond to an expected surge in demand so that children's assessments are completed in time, visits remain in line with children's plans and other key safeguarding indicators remain strong.
- 3. Supporting Corporate Parenting**-Remaining in close contact with our care leavers is important to reducing the negative impacts of the pandemic on this group of young people. Ensuring sufficiency of quality placements to support stability and mitigate against any impacts on supply is critical to recovery.
- 4. Children's mental health and wellbeing**- ensuring services have capacity is critical to responding to the increase in demand experienced since the pandemic.
- 5. Life Chances**-lost days in school cannot be reversed and for some will have an impact on future life choices and chances. Young people are disproportionately impacted in the employment sector and are more likely to be furloughed. Families are facing increased financial hardship which will impact on childhood poverty and its negative impacts on a range of outcomes.
- 6. Parks and Greenspaces**-access to quality outdoor space is critical for health and wellbeing of children and their families particularly for families who live in poor housing. Being outdoors and taking regular exercise has a positive impact on childhood obesity and mental health.

## Recovery Intentions

**We will support children and young people to develop and flourish**

Children of all ages have missed out on a significant amount of time in school and early years settings which will impact on their learning and social and emotional development. We have done well to maintain a network of schools that have been able to offer provision to key workers and

our vulnerable children and young people. For children with SEND the impact of missing schools can be significant and we have maintained a range of services. In a recent visit the DfE, NHS(E) and SEND Advisor it was concluded that *“the Barnet’s response to Covid 19 has been strong in comparison to many other areas. I am unaware of any significant initiatives taken elsewhere that have not been taken in Barnet”*

For some children attending school is a vital part of safeguarding and is a significant protective factor. Our schools and social workers have been working together to risk assess and encourage school attendance and this joint work will continue throughout the gradual reopening of schools.

Getting children back to school is a critical part of our strategy and have implanted a “Barnet Back to School” campaign to support, children, young people, parents and carers and education staff transition back into the class room. We recognise that this is not possible for all of Barnet’s children either because of the phased return, parental preference or other reasons such as health vulnerabilities. For those children we will put in place other ways of engaging them in learning and other opportunities to support their development, for example through the provision of lap tops and 4G routers and the outdoor spaces project. We will work with schools to fully reopen in September and provide the wrap around support that is needed to ensure children are fully supported. The pandemic has highlighted that there are a number of children and families that are experiencing digital exclusion which we will address.

We are seeing negative effects on employment and training opportunities particularly for the 18-24 cohort. Economic wellbeing outcomes will be less good which in turn will impact on ability to access good quality housing, food and afford things that will help them stay connected such as laptops. Inevitably this will have a negative effect on mental health and wellbeing for some young people. We will need to work closely with local training organisations and employers to develop opportunities for young people and ensure they have the skills that the jobs market needs to increase their employability chances. These issues need to be addressed urgently through a reinvigorated “Life Chances Strategy” so that it addresses the current issues and priorities. We will commission a survey so that it is informed by what children and young people tell us.

Nationally and in Barnet we are witnessing an impact on children’s mental health and if we want our children to flourish this need addressing urgently. In Barnet we are delivering our CAMHS Transformation plan and have a strong early help offer delivered by the council through the Barnet Integrated Clinical Service (BICS). We also commission a range of services including KOOTH an online counselling service. We are seeing an increase in anxiety related presentations because of worries related to COVID and the effects it is having on job, schooling and exams, family life and worries about loved ones. We will continue to invest in these services and will monitor demand closely and increase capacity to ensure that no child or young person is without the help and support they need.

### **We will ensure Barnet is Family Friendly**

In the 2019 Young People survey 84% of young people said they felt that Barnet is a family friendly place to live and we want that to continue. Family life has been disrupted in different ways and given its cross cutting nature many services have a role to play in maintaining Barnet as a family friendly place to live. We want to maintain good, outstanding schools, attractive open places and parks to visit, leisure opportunities including restoring libraries and good quality housing.

Critical to Family Friendly is access to parks so that families can benefit from the myriad of benefits to health and wellbeing. The global pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures have highlighted the valuable contribution Barnet’s parks make to residents’ mental and physical health. With alternative

venues closed indefinitely, parks have provided a key service in ensuring residents are able to carry out daily exercise whilst observing social distancing guidelines.

The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (POSS) sets a clear and ambitious vision:

*“Barnet’s greenspaces will be amongst the best in London, and LBB is seen as a national leader in the provision of suburban parks. It is committed to ensuring that its greenspaces deliver a wide range of economic, social and environmental benefits to all those who live, work in and visit the Borough.”*

There are two workstreams within the Greenspaces & Leisure Recovery Programme workstreams that will have a positive impact on ensuring Barnet is Family Friendly: the S106 Area Committee Programme which is responsible for delivery of developing a forward plan for the improvement of parks; and the Volunteers and Friends Groups workstream which will delivery increased use of parks and increased volunteering.

Libraries are another community resource that benefits the entire family by creating opportunities for engaging in learning and social activities, and access to a wealth of reading and educational materials. The enhanced online offer has proved extremely successful this will continue alongside the gradual restoration of other aspects of the library service.

### **We will support the workforce to transition to a new operating model**

We have not seen the impact on staffing capacity and the level of disruption to services that was first envisaged. Our resilience indicators have remained at a level 2 consistently and most services continue relatively normal, albeit a virtual model, levels of delivery. However, we do have c150 staff self-isolating due to long term conditions which is a key consideration in ensuring the health and wellbeing of these individuals as we gradually return to a level of normality. We have carried out risk assessments for home working, office and outside spaces which have been shared with staff by their Team manager and Head of Service who will provide assurance of implementation to SLT. We are also carrying out risk assessments on individuals when needed, in line with corporate guidance.

Family Service’s staff took part in a [COVID19 staff survey](#) in May. These are the published [results](#) which indicate some very positive findings in terms of how staff are feeling and are in the main in line with the overall response. The highlights include: most staff reported that they struggled with IT at the time of the survey, although that has since improved dramatically; most staff have adapted well to working at home, citing reduced travel time and better work-life balance as the top two benefits; most staff have adapted to remote working and are still able to work as part of a team and feel connected; staff said they felt well-informed and that they were most interested in hearing about recovery and exiting lockdown, support in remote working, and the councils’ overall COVID19 response. We will continue to promote and encourage staff to use all the main communication channels, such as the Grapevine and, First Team emails and DCS messages to stay engaged an up to date on developments.

Most of you said that you wanted to keep some of the things that we have been doing differently in lockdown. Now is the time to start talking in your team meetings and 121s with your managers and how this might look in the future.

There were a couple of things highlighted that I would like you to concentrate on – it concerns me that you most of you were either not aware or didn’t use the [home-working self-assessment](#). I’ve talked a lot about your wellbeing, and this includes your physical health, so please take time to do that now. Some of you said that you didn’t have access to PPE, so I have reattached Update 34 that tells you how and when to access it

We have been very mindful of the emotional impact on staff whether they are continuing to be out and about in the community, working from home or in self-isolation. That is why we have identified a lead for staff wellbeing and are providing materials for staff and managers and information on support available and this will continue into recovery phase and beyond. To support colleagues working in schools manage the transition we will develop a support network for schools whereby a clinical practitioner from the BIC service is assigned to each school.

A spike in demand across the system is anticipated as we move into recovery and as more children return to school. We are working with corporate HR to develop our recruitment strategy which will be based on our “grow your own” approach, the option of overseas recruitment and will identify additional capacity required. While this is being developed we will continue to recruit and use virtual means to do this.

We are also developing a fostering campaign to ensure we continue to have capacity to support current and future demand and that internal fostering is the point of first choice for most placements.

### **We will support each other**

Supporting and staying in touch with colleagues is important for mental health and wellbeing and maintaining a resilient workforce is vital to recovery. Being away from the office has its positives but can also be isolating for some people. Staff have come together in new ways to stay connected and provide vital peer support. SLT/SMT have been staying in touch through skype and teams have used this for meetings and supervisions. Other less formal staying in touch activities have included virtual coffee catch ups, regular on line get togethers, team videos and challenges. We will continue to use technology for team meetings, supervisions etc and encourage informal activities as means of staying in touch and to add a splash of fun to what is a challenging time.

Our lead for staff wellbeing has developed a support offer for staff including self-help materials, consultations and blogs which will continue.

The DCS messages have worked well in keeping the workforce updated with key messages and connected to what is happening within and external to the council. This is something we will retain during recovery and into business as usual.

### **We will support flexible and remote working**

We will continue to adopt a work from home when you can policy and will support staff to do that, linking in with cooperate colleagues on issues with IT etc. to ensure that staff have the technology required for them to do their jobs. We will use corporately approved platforms such as Microsoft Teams to facilitate mobile working. Feedback from staff has been that working from home has been less stressful and freed up time so they feel more on top of their work and that the technology, when working well, has had a positive impact on engagement with both families and colleagues. To do their jobs staff have been flexible with the hours that they work to manage childcare and other demands. This will continue during the recovery phase and will need to be considered alongside the changes to office working as capacity for hot desking will be reduced.

### **We will develop a safe office environment**

There will be times when staff are required to be in the office and this is likely to increase as we move through the recovery phase and settle into a steady state of delivering in new ways. We will retain a mixture of remote and onsite working in line with guidance and will work with corporate colleagues to ensure a safe working environment adhering to emerging guidance on social distancing.

The move to Colindale means we will have a reduced desk to staff ratio. This will reduce further in line with social distancing and we will need to agree what measures will be put in place to manage the number of staff in the office at any one time such as limiting attendance in the office to two members for each team and re-establishing the P2 rota. Individual services/teams will need to plan how this is managed guided by a set of principles informed by safety guidance, available capacity and agreed by SMT.

### **We will continue to use technology to support practice**

The use of WhatsApp, skype, ZOOM for Business and Microsoft Teams have all been central to maintaining service delivery. It has enabled social workers to stay in touch with families where physical visits have not been possible and has enabled child protection conferences, LAC reviews, MARAC and panels to continue. One social worker reported that they have had more time to spend with families in a meaningful way.

*“With regards to what works well for me I am a permanent member of I and P 7 Safeguarding social worker. I have enjoyed the video calls to children and have felt that I actually have a lot more time to talk to them in a meaningful way than always rushed in their homes after battling through traffic. I am still undertaking face to face visits but am using the video calls in between this”*

Video conferencing has worked well in bringing looked after children into their reviews enabling them to contribute more. Multi-agency attendance at virtual conferences and panels has been better than pre COVID which has enhanced collaboration. The frequency of supervision has been maintained and improved in some cases using technology.

Although using technology is no substitute for face to face meetings and contact with families it can add value particularly in improving attendance by reducing the need to travel and for engaging young people and staying in touch in between planned visits and reviews. We therefore support this to continue in a planned way and will amend practice standards accordingly.

Support and training for EHM and LCS has also been delivered through a range of technology enabled solutions, including live streaming and webinars and have proved successful and will be maintained.

### **We will streamline reporting and data**

The use of a streamlined set of key indicators has worked well for daily reporting. Although the frequency of reporting will reduce in line with London resilience requirements we will consider how to retain a more composite set of data reports into recovery phase and business as usual which focuses on what matters most, and introduce single points of contact for data analysis with clear process for how this is shared and checked.

### **We will restore services when and however possible**

Although most services have been maintained, albeit in different ways, some services have been reduced in line with P2 service planning for example children’s centre services. We will plan to restore these services while adhering to emerging guidance and will put in place plans that draw on learning from how schools have approached this and that are phased accordingly. Each service area within Family Services will develop a five-point recovery plan. A key aspect of practice will be restored as part of recovery-1:1, Family and group work and children seen by professionals in the home, school and in the community where it is practical and safe to do so.

We have been staying in touch with providers to monitor the impact on their services and to support them maintain delivery wherever possible. This has included working with providers to expand provision to ensure sufficiency of placements and joining up with regional consortium to avoid duplication of information and reduce burdens on placement providers. We have established a system

for identifying and assessing financial support needs on a provider by provider basis. We will continue this work with our commissioned services to support them to restore services as appropriate.

Libraries have continued to offer an enhanced digital offer which has been successful. There will be a gradual reintroduction of services starting with the Home Library service and we will introduce a “click and collect” services from the four core plus libraries. Other services will be resumed when it is safe and practical to do so following the 5-stage recovery plan.

**We will continue to collaborate across the system**

During this time good communication and joined up working has been more crucial than ever. Work with the community and voluntary sector through the support hub work has created new and strengthened links which should be retained. We have also seen increased collaboration at sub region and pan London level on resilience planning, placement planning and supply and distribution of PPE. We want to maintain these networks and make the most of new opportunities that will benefit families living in Barnet, in particular the joint approaches to working with providers being led by the west London consortium and sponsored by ALDCS.

**We will review our strategic plans to ensure they remain fit for purpose**

We need to plan for life being different with new and emerging issues and set of impacts brought about by the pandemic. For example, we know that children’s mental health is as important as ever although the things that concerns young people might have changed, and we know that there will be a significant economic impact which could mean increased numbers of children living in poverty. To that end we will review our plans and strategies to ensure they reflect the current context and emerging priorities starting with the Children & Young People’s Plan and Life Chances Strategy. To inform this we will commission a young people’s survey.

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