

**THE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE  
(CORONAVIRUS) (TEMPORARY  
MODIFICATION OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL  
CARE) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND)  
2020**

**MONITORING REPORT – August 2020**

## **Background**

On 6 May the Department of Health made a set of Regulations which modify some of the statutory duties and timescales set out in existing children's social care legislation. The modifications came into operation from 7 May and will apply for a period of 6 months (until 7 November 2020). The aim is to provide HSC Trusts and independent service providers with greater flexibility in order to maintain essential services to looked-after children (LAC) during the COVID-19 period and to ensure that children's services are able to effectively respond in the event that pressures arise as current restrictions are gradually lifted.

The Regulations are supported by Departmental guidance which sets out where flexibility may be applied and sets out clearly the considerations providers must make when making decisions under the Regulations.

The modifications apply to: visits to Looked after children, including children placed for adoption; visits by registered providers to children's homes; reviews of Looked after children cases, including those placed in secure accommodation and those awaiting adoption; reviews of pathway plans for care leavers; foster care reviews and timescales for emergency or immediate placements; and the representations / complaints procedure under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

This report provides data for the month of August 2020 on the implementation of the Regulations by HSC Trusts. It also includes information provided by relevant voluntary adoption agencies, independent foster care providers, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, AccessNI and the Independent Chair of the Multi-Agency Panel for Secure Care.

## Summary

### Visits

#### ***Visits to Looked after Children***

- 3,961 (99%) out of a planned 4,016 visits took place during the month of August.
- 55 (1%) visits were deferred.
- Of those visits that took place, 81% continued on a face-to-face basis while 18% took place remotely.

#### ***Registered Provider visits to children's homes***

- 51 Monthly Monitoring Reports were submitted by Registered Providers of children's homes to RQIA. 39% of visits were conducted remotely.

### Reviews

#### ***Looked After Reviews***

- 55 1st Reviews for Looked After children were due to be completed this month. 12 reviews (22%) were held outside normal timescales. Some of these delays were COVID-related.
- 88 2<sup>nd</sup> Reviews for Looked After children were due to be completed this month. 11 of these reviews (13%) were held outside normal timescales. A number of these delays were COVID-related.

#### ***Care Leavers – Pathway Plan***

- 114 Pathway Plans were due to be reviewed during the month. 16 of the plans (14%) were reviewed at intervals of more than 6 months during the month. The delays were for a number of reasons including COVID-related.

#### ***Adoption Reviews***

- One adoption review was not completed within normal timescales. The delay was due to impact of lockdown on child.

## **Secure Care**

- All reviews were completed within normal timescales and arrangements.

## **Approvals**

### ***Foster care – children***

- 3 children were placed in an emergency placement for a period between 24 hours and 14 days.
- 26 children were placed in an immediate placement for between 12 and 20 weeks.
- None of these children were placed with an approved prospective adopter or a registered childminder.

### ***Foster Carers***

- No fast track barred list checks were undertaken by AccessNI.
- No foster carers were approved on the basis of a fast track barred list check only.
- 46 foster carers did not receive their 12 monthly review this month.
- 242 foster care reviews were more than 3 months overdue. Some of these were COVID-related.

## **Representations / Complaints**

- Three representations / complaints were responded to during August within the longer timeframe of 28 days to 2 months. The reasons for delay in responses were the complexity of case and the need to work across teams to prepare a response. All three complaints have now been investigated and responses submitted for approval.