

COVID-19 Public Sector Committee

1315 Thursday 21 May 2020

Zoom Call

ACTIONS

1. ALL DEPARTMENTS to work with DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION on the restoration of services for vulnerable children and families within their recovery plans.
2. DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION to work with the DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS to share information on demand for children services, including international examples of restoration of services following lockdown.
3. DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION and MINISTRY FOR HOUSING COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT to review and share which schools and local authorities have been most successful supporting the return of children to school, and why, and to review the trajectory of attendance in education settings.
4. DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS to update LORD AGNEW on the approach taken to access to food for vulnerable people as we enter Phase 2 of the response and the shielded and non-shielded cohorts change, with an emphasis on how to reduce inefficiency or waste.
5. ALL DEPARTMENTS to support the MINISTER FOR DISABLED PEOPLE and the DISABILITY UNIT to ensure that their communications are fully accessible for disabled people.
6. ALL DEPARTMENTS to consider data gaps on the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people as relevant to their work, and share/discuss with the DISABILITY UNIT.
7. ALL DEPARTMENTS to work with the DISABILITY UNIT to ensure opportunities and lessons learned from the Covid-19 response are reflected in the National Strategy for Disabled People.

Summary Bullets

- Minister Ford updated the Committee on progress to enhance the safety net for **vulnerable children**.
 - There are cases of serious harm in relation to young children and teenagers, and a number of operational challenges which require x-departmental work. E.g. 1) getting birth registrations service back up and running (HO); 2) keep family courts running (MoJ); and, 3) ensuring food access to vulnerable children (Defra). CDL was particularly interested in which LAs and schools had performed well supporting the return of schools, and why. *See action 3*.
 - DfE want further consideration of vulnerable children in the next iteration of the government wide recovery plan, and requested departments prioritise in internal planning. *See action 1*. They also requested more direct communication with children and young people.
- Minister Prentis highlighted strong action by the Supermarket sector has meant that **access to food** has been improving and that Government role has moved towards signposting citizens.
 - Minister Prentis highlighted that 128K people have **volunteered** through the GoodSAM app to help with shopping for shielded/vulnerable people. SCOPE, RNIB, Age UK and Mind are now referring people for supermarket delivery slots. Focus of the Taskforce will be to work through operational challenges of data sharing and scaling up.
- The Minister for Disabled People stressed the importance of considering **disabled** people in the 'recovery' phase of COVID and of obtaining better data across government on the impact of COVID on people with disabilities. Opportunities and risks have arisen and important for Departments to consider how to be inclusive in their recovering plans. *See actions 5-7*.

READOUT

Welcome and Parish Notices

- Death continues to be on downward curve, latest number is lowest since 26th march rate continuing to go down,
- Have been tracking impact of 11th may announcements - increases in use of outdoor space, closely correlated with increases in temp - beaches, parks higher than spikes we have seen before
- Have seen a spike in people spending more time outside of their residential area

- CDL - comments this is irrelevant as we enter bank holiday weekend and remains warm

VVP Programme: Update Vulnerable Children Deep Dive (Minister Ford)

- Minister Ford highlighted much progress has been made to enhance the safety net for vulnerable children, highlight that over 75% of children with child protection plans have been seen in past 2 weeks and that central government is satisfied that over 90% of LAs are managing well (DFE are working with the remaining LAs).
- However, the minister said there have been a higher number of serious harm cases during the C-19 response than on average, especially in relation to babies and teenagers.
- The minister had three key asks of the committee: a greater focus on vulnerable children and young people (noting that this was absent from the Recovery plan recently published), that cross-government work related to this area is prioritised - e.g. the deployment of health visitors and finally for more direct communication with children. Joint DFE/Children in Need work has found children are still finding Government messaging on C-19 confusing.
- DFE will continue to push for more vulnerable children to return to school, but her department is not setting a fixed target - vulnerable children already have low attendance rates. This is why DfE are employing a 2 pronged strategy; trying to get vulnerable children back to school, but also operating an 'eyes on' approach via LA's/childrens' services for children not in school
- This work has delivered a number of significant actions e.g. production of online learning materials, delivery of electronic devices to vulnerable children - the first lot of which was delivered yesterday
- This work needs to carry on with urgency. This minister highlighted a number of operational asks from OGDs:
 - Get the birth registration service back up and running
 - Keep family courts running
 - Ensuring food access to vulnerable children
- DFE are looking towards recovery and will be considering the educational, safeguarding, wellbeing aspects of this - cross-government work is necessary, especially in relation to mental health support
- Considering the bigger picture, it's very important children feel like they are not forgotten - OGDs need to continue to talk about childrens' issues in their comms - e.g. children's health services
- Talking briefly about work on Free School Meals, the minister highlighted that the scheme had provided over £90 million worth of food to vulnerable children, and that there needs to be progress with cross government work to ensure there is a solution for these children in place for the end of the summer term.
- **Welsh Govt., Jane Hutt:** keen for DfE to work with the DAs and consider demand on children's services, including what demand can be seen in countries where lockdown has been lifted.
- **DHSC, Helen Whately:** very aware of the need to restore children's health services- need to make sure, for example, school nurses are returned. Agree mental health services for children and young people are critical - these services have been open for business during the Covid response, operating remotely. Regarding carers and

young carers - are schools/ DfE able to identify where children are carers? As these children may need particular support.

- **Home Office, James Brokenshire:** highly supportive of this work, hidden crimes summit today will pull these issues out. HO are particularly interested in the online element and how the government can get internet service providers to do more to protect and identify those who are vulnerable. Responding to the actions for HO raised in the slides - serious violence work is being taken forward by the crime and justice taskforce. Birth registration service - HO are working on this and would like to be able to instruct registrars soon to restore the service.
- **HMT, Jesse Norman** - on FSM, the CX and Chief Sec are very concerned about any extension and do not support extending funding, CX made clear he did not see the case for going further, and public comms have reflected that.
- **CDL** - agreeing with Jesse, noted the CX was willing to extend over Easter but it is appreciated that HMT cannot fund FSM for all during half term - know CX is clear and we respect that.
- **CDL** - the LA dashboard is very helpful, can we tell which LAs are performing best in terms of getting vulnerable children into school, getting "eyes on" via social workers, and being able to ensure overall school attendance? How can we make sure these best performing LA's are sharing best practice?
- **DfE, Vicky Ford**- DfE has data on nearly all LA's, this shows a correlation between school attendance and levels of COVID in community, dependency on public transport amongst other factors. On young carers - schools will be understanding about anyone within a shielding family returning to school, will take away specific ask around identifying young carers. The minister noted DfE is doing lots of work with HO on hidden crimes and more announcements coming out will be coming out on this. It is important to remember that there are twice as many children in domestic violence shelters as adults. On FSM - the minister was not suggesting HMT fund the programme over summer, but that wider issues associated with food vulnerability will need to be solved by end of summer term.
- **CDL** - an action will be recorded for DfE to work with DA's on demand for children's services, including looking at the experience of other countries where lockdown has been lifted.
- **CDL** - as another action, it would be good to look at which LA's have been most successful as well as looking forward and considering where we think most VC will be returning to school.
- Summing up **CDL**, affirmed that the points had been well understood and any future recovery plan will consider the issues/ concerns of vulnerable children.

VVP Programme: Update Access to Food Deep Dive (Minister Prentis)

- Minister Prentis started by stating this work is a cross departmental effort and she is grateful to depts for their contributions.
- This work seeks to help those who have trouble accessing food as they are staying at home because they are vulnerable. The team has not tried to define the group too exclusively.
- The solutions are focussed on local, practical help - most of this group are currently receiving support to access food from friends and neighbours.

- The market has adapted very well to this challenge, there has been a 40 fold increase in supermarket deliveries. Because of this, the role for govt is largely to signpost to available support - for example via gov.uk.
- The minister mentioned the grocery delivery referral service - which enables charities such as SCOPE, RNIB, Age UK and Mind to refer people for supermarket delivery slots. Data protection has slowed some of this work up. DEFRA are trying to roll this out as soon as possible - aiming for 75% coverage by the end of June.
- On volunteering, the minister noted that 128k people are undertaking shopping/ community tasks via the GoodSam app.
- The minister recognised that changes to public health guidance may mean this work ends up supporting a much wider group than initially envisaged.
- **CDL** thanked the minister and teams involved, commenting that the 40 fold increase in supermarket delivery slots was especially notable
- **Lord Agnew** - asked how DEFRA and other departments will adapt the approach to access to food for vulnerable people as we enter Phase 2 of the response and the shielded and non-shielded cohorts change, with an emphasis on how to reduce inefficiency or waste.
- **Welsh Govt** - highlighted that government support the food bank network has been particularly impactful, especially regarding food distribution. **CDL** agreed that foodbanks play a vital role.
- **MHCLG, Chris Pincher** - 2,226,000 shielded people are currently receiving food packages - as this group changes - we need to make sure the NSV offer adapts to consider presently shielded people who may no longer be shielded if guidance changes.

Impact of Covid-19 on People with Disabilities

- The Minister for Disabled People began by explaining the role of the Disability Unit - based in CO but responsible to DWP, in raising awareness of disability across government and sharing best practice.
- 1 in 5 people in the UK have a disability and most people become disabled during their working lives, as opposed to being born with a disability. There are also big variations across the regions.
- As we move through the response, we need to be cognisant of how the adaptations made during the Covid response and "new normal" feed in to the National Strategy for Disabled People (a PM backed initiative)
- Engagement with stakeholders suggests there is a positive view of the Covid-19 response, especially the pace at which new initiatives had been put in place.
- However this work has highlighted a lack of data across government on disability issues, an example being the DEFRA food supply work which is subject to a data lag.
- The minister highlighted that all departments must work to ensure their communications are accessible to disabled people.
- The minister affirmed that the Covid response presents both risks and opportunities for disabled people - some changes that would have taken years to implement in 'normal times' have been made possible very quickly.
- As we move through the recovery, the government should ensure that the recovery is inclusive.
- In terms of next steps - the minister said more work was needed from departments to go further on evidence, and that the Disability Unit will be in touch about this.

- **Welsh Govt, Jane Hutt** - highlighted risk of redundancies for disabled people, risk disabled people might be asked back to work too soon if not shielded - hope we can collaborate - challenge to get disabled people back into the labour market. Issue about carers of disabled people - some carers might need to have an extension to furlough.
- **Scottish Government**- agree with MFDP and support this work, recognise it is a cross departmental challenge. In Scotland there is a programme called - "Build Back Better" - which recognises some of the changes made have benefitted disabled people.
- **CDL** - great to have alignment across govts, risks and opportunities - more flexible and supportive ways of working
- **CDL** confirmed that the committee agrees with all next steps outlined on the final slide.