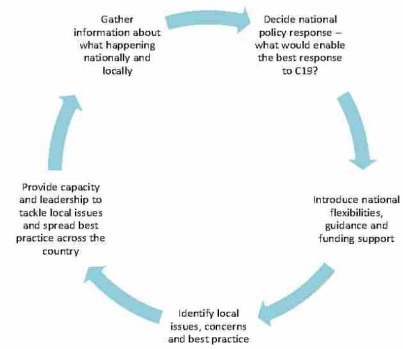


Keeping vulnerable children and young people safe from increased risks of exploitation and abuse - COVID-19

April 2020



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Summary: issues, what we've done and asks on OGDs

Issues

Increased risks – c.400,000 children with a social worker. 28,000 vulnerable children in school on 31/03 - fallen since week 1

- ❖ Abuse (incl. non accidental injury) and neglect within families will rise with extra pressure and more time together
- ❖ Harms outside families e.g. increased sexual and criminal exploitation of children not in school, both online and in the community
- ❖ Pressure on families managing children at home, including those with complex needs
- ❖ Children's social care system was on the brink of crisis before and now more so with increased demand and pressures of responding to Covid
- ❖ Residential provision under pressure, including 13 secure children's homes
- ❖ Insufficient children's services workforce (including foster carers, many of whom are 65+) available to support the most vulnerable

Summary of what government has done so far:

- ✓ Attendance at education settings expectation for vulnerable children
- ✓ £1.6bn package for local authorities
- ✓ Guidance published (schools, vulnerable children, safeguarding)
- ✓ Emergency legislation enabling 8,000 more registered social workers
- ✓ MHCLG: £14m to families through Troubled Families programme
- ✓ Support for weak councils and creation of regional teams (REACT), including Ofsted inspectors
- ✓ Daily contact with e.g. practitioners, leaders, the third sector to monitor / problem solve
- ✓ Local authorities early help and family support services have been re-organised to continue direct work with families by phone and to start up proactive welfare check-in services

Priority cross government asks:

1. To communicate (Slide 6)

- Overall awareness of vulnerable children and young people as key group
- Our support package to vulnerable children, including those defined as newly at risk
- Importance of social workers and workers in special, early years, residential and youth services

2. To keep the system working (Slide 6)

- Children's workforce needs for PPE appropriately recorded and prioritised with Crown Commercial
- Supporting residential provision: insurance invalidation issues, food and workforce supply
- Testing – keeping maximum workforce across essential children's services
- Tackling heightened risk of domestic abuse and resulting risks to children

3. To provide more funding to support (Slide 8)

- Bolster the workforce (e.g. more agency staff)
- More vulnerable children in all education settings
- Specific groups e.g. care leavers and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Key risks and issues

The Government has prioritised vulnerable children in its response to COVID-19. It has advised they attend school, as a protective factor, to keep them safe. There are c575,000 vulnerable children – c.6% of total pupils – of which 400,000 have a social worker (focus of this pack) and c.270,000 have an education, health and care (EHC) plan (to cover in future discussion). Attendance has been lower than expected. **Government needs to support families more than ever at this time to protect children from harm.**

Aims

- 1** Increase attendance in education or encourage alternatives
Support from: DfE (MHCLG, DCMS)
- 2** Improve safety and wellbeing within the home environment
Support from: DHSC, MHCLG, DfE, HO, DCMS
- 3** Mitigate the threat from wider community risks
Support from: HO, MHCLG, DfE
- 4** Ensure care leavers are not disproportionately impacted by Covid-19 and responses to it
Support from: DfE, MHCLG
- 5** Strengthen system capacity to respond to current risks and future challenges of recovery
Support from: DfE, MHCLG, HO, DHSC

Risks and issues

Vulnerable children are not attending provision

- 6% attendance by vulnerable children (15,500 with SW; 10,400 EHCP)
- 50% decrease over course of last week (70,000 to 28,000)
- Lost Year 11 cohort in AP and 3% attendance in state funded nurseries

Children are vulnerable to increased intra-familial harm e.g. abuse and neglect

- 46% of child deaths or serious harm in 2019 (out of 538) were not known to social care – risk of harm to c.2.3m 'invisible children'
- Domestic violence in China tripled over the epidemic (similar in Italy)

Children are vulnerable to increased extra-familial harm e.g. online harms

- Police are seeing an increase in emergency safeguarding calls
- Widespread concern that National Panel Notifications for Serious Incidents are not increasing – suggests underreporting and later surge

Care leavers are vulnerable to hardship, financial instability and isolation

- Care leavers represent 25% of rough sleeper and the prison population
- Around 6,500 young people will leave care in the next 6 months and could be forced to leave their accommodation without a safety net

The system is on the brink of crisis increasing the risk of harm to children

- 80% of LAs overspent their children's social care budget in each of the last five years
- Around 50% of LAs rated 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement'

Examples: what we've done to tackle the risks

National

- Education providers and social workers are agreeing with families whether children in need should be attending provision – education settings following up non attendance.
- Emergency Coronavirus Act: social workers who have recently left the profession can return - 8,000 social workers have been added to the social work register.
- Issued and regularly updated guidance e.g. vulnerable children; safeguarding; local authorities; online safety
- More flexible Adoption Support Fund: virtual therapeutic support to adoptive children and Special Guardian families
- Stopped routine Ofsted inspections

Local

- Joint DfE/Ofsted teams - (*REACT*) bringing field forces together to support local areas and deploying inspectors into LAs
- Daily contact with practitioners, leaders, the third sector to monitor / problem solve
- Local authorities early help and family support services continuing work with families by phone

Other Government Departments

Home Office:

- Working with partners to improve the intelligence picture
- Increasing comms to safeguarding professionals and public
- Ensuring support provision for victims and those at risk

MHCLG

- Additional £1.6bn funding for local government
- Supporting families including £16m through Troubled Families programme

DEFRA:

- Working with DfE on food supply issues

DHSC:

- Bid with LAs (and others) to fund online parenting support
- NHS frontline safeguarding work continues

CASE STUDY: North Lincolnshire local authority

- SEND, Inclusion and Social Care teams are combining their data and providing schools with names of vulnerable children, rather than just numbers
- Schools then provide a light-touch 'yes/no' response on school attendance. Social workers are RAG rating each vulnerable child and contacting families
- Schools and multi-academy trusts are also proactively following up themselves with families of children who are not attending school

What we are taking action on next and where we need OGD support

DfE will lead the system to support vulnerable children, working with national and local partners

Children and young people

- Keep schools open for vulnerable children over Easter
- Monitor vulnerable under 5s who are not attending settings
- Extend virtual school head role to promote better attendance
- Deploy children's charities to reach 'invisible children' (c.2.3m)

Placements

- Explore extra capacity in residential 'outward bound' provision and boarding schools
- Collect data on closures of children's homes and rapidly process existing applications for new homes (Ofsted)

Workforce and local resilience

- Use new REACT teams to problem solve locally and provide intelligence back to the centre
- Publish guidance on PPE/testing so SWs can maintain vital home visits
- Gather **local data and intel on scale of need for PPE**
- Reinforce the message to local authorities/statutory safeguarding partners on notifying serious incidents

Parents and carers

- Communicate better with parents and carers, including improved signposting of support on parenting and parental conflict

We ask you to help us:

1. Communicate important messages	OGDs	2. To keep the system working	OGDs
Vulnerable children are a group in need of support	No.10, MHCLG, HO, DWP	Support for residential/foster care	HMT, DHSC
Share consistent message on school and early years settings being a safe place through all channels and ramp up campaigns across government to signpost family support		Move residential children's care homes onto the prioritised list of organisations for food, medicines and testing	
Our support package to vulnerable children	No.10	PPE and testing as needed for children's workforce	DHSC, PHE, CCS
Expediting continued advice and guidance for CYP, parents, education settings, VSC orgs		Ensure we have the right equipment where and when needed and necessary testing to keep workforce working	
The great work of social workers and workers in special, residential and youth services	No.10, DHSC	Provision of wider family support in schools	MHCLG, DWP, DHSC, DCMS
Valuing SWs alongside other workers e.g. police		Food, internet, school resources to incentivise attendance and better deployment of youth workers/third sector	
PPE: who needs it and when to use it	No.10, DHSC, PHE	Support to care leavers	DWP, MHCLG
Consistent, reassuring messages on PPE through DfE/DHSC published guidance to keep this workforce working		Stable accommodation, jobs, income and access to services which might be under pressure like jobcentre support	
		Domestic abuse and adult risks	MoJ, HO, DWP
		Awareness across system on prison releases; concerted cross government strategies on domestic abuse	

We need more funding to improve attendance, support services and target specific groups

In order to mitigate these substantial risks, we are seeking additional funding for local government via the existing MHCLG process (c.£300m). We are also picking up separate discussions about additional DfE programme spend (c.£60m) with HMT colleagues, where pressures are not affordable within existing budgets through repurposing.

1	Increase attendance in education or encourage alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of the Virtual School Head role to cover all children in need • A specific Home to School flexible transport fund for children with SEND
Support from: DfE (MHCLG, DCMS)		
2	Improve safety and wellbeing within the home environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to devices and internet connectivity for vulnerable children to enable virtual contact with social workers and support home education
Support from: DHSC, MHCLG, DfE, HO, DCMS		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uplift to Family Fund Trust for practical support to families of severely disabled children including: internet, food provision, greater 1-1 contact time • Bolstering the workforces that support vulnerable children (see '3' below)
3	Mitigate the threat from wider community risks	<p>Bolstering the workforce that support vulnerable children, including funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional temporary staff and paid overtime to ensure supply of social workers; SEND; Educational Psychologists; LA education services; CAHMS
Support from: HO, MHCLG, DfE		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to devices and internet connectivity to support social workers to enable homeworking and virtual contact with families
4	Ensure care leavers are not disproportionately impacted by Covid-19 and responses to it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hardship fund for care leavers to prevent homelessness and unemployment
Support from: DfE, MHCLG		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued support for those who would 'age out' of the care system when they turn 18 or 21 during covid-19
5	Strengthen system capacity to respond to current risks and future challenges of recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A DfE emergency intervention fund to mitigate emergent LA service failure, delivered through regional teams
Support from: DfE, MHCLG, HO, DHSC		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding to ensure there are sufficient UASC and foster placements • Bolstering the workforces that support vulnerable children (see '3' above)