

Agenda – Children, Young People and Education Committee

Meeting Venue:

Senedd

Meeting date: 18 May 2020

Meeting time: 13.30

For further information contact:

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Committee Clerk

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Informal pre-meeting

(13.30 – 14.00)

In accordance with Standing Order 34.19, the Chair has determined that the public are excluded from the Committee's meeting in order to protect public health. This meeting will be broadcast live on www.senedd.tv.

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(14.00)

2 COVID-19: Evidence session on the impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable children with representatives of the third sector and frontline staff

(14.00 – 15.00)

(Pages 1 – 33)

Allison Hulme, National Director – BASW Cymru.

Sarah Crawley, Director – Barnardos Cymru

Vivienne Laing, Policy and Public Affairs Manager – NSPCC Cymru

Louise Israel, Childline Senior Supervisor – NSPCC Cymru

Attached Documents:

Research Brief



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament

CYPE(5)-14-20 – Paper 1 – NSPCC Cymru

CYPE(5)-14-20 – Paper 1a – NSPCC Cymru

CYPE(5)-14-20 – Paper 2 – Barnardos

3 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 (ix) to resolve to exclude the public from item 4 of today's meeting

(15.00)

Break

(15.00 – 15.10)

4 COVID-19: Consideration of evidence

(15.10 – 15.30)

5 COVID-19: Evidence session on the impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable children with Heads of Children's Services and the National Independent Safeguarding Board

(15.30 – 16.30)

(Page 34)

Marian Parry Hughes, Head of the All Wales Heads of Children's Services
Sally Jenkins, Head of Children and Family Services – Newport City Council
Craig McLeod, Senior Manager Children and Workforce – Flintshire County Council

Jan Coles, Head of Children's Services – Powys County Council
Jane Randell, Chair – National Independent Safeguarding Board

Attached Documents:

CYPE(5)-14-20 – Paper 3 – Heads of Children's Services

6 Paper to note

6.1 Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee to the Welsh Government – request for further detail following the COVID-19 evidence sessions

(Pages 35 – 40)

Attached Documents:

CYPE(5)-14-20 – Paper to note 1

7 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 (ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of this meeting
(16.30)

8 COVID-19: Consideration of evidence
(16.30 – 17.00)

Document is Restricted

<p>Senedd Cymru Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg</p> <p>Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19 ar blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru</p> <p>COV – 23 Ymateb gan: NSPCC Cymru</p>	<p>Welsh Parliament Children, Young People and Education Committee</p> <p>Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on children and young people in Wales</p> <p>COV - 23 Response from: NSPCC Cymru</p>
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Introduction

Coronavirus is impacting upon every child across the UK. The NSPCC is still here for the children who need us – and we’re needed more than ever. Childline has experienced unprecedented demand for its services as the pandemic has affected children’s lives: between the 21 January 2020 and 15 April 2020, Childline has delivered 2,789 counselling sessions across the UK to children and young people who were concerned about Coronavirus.

Across the country, family life has changed overnight. Vulnerable children and families are at increased risk during the pandemic. As highlighted in a recent blog on the Ace Hub “our response to the COVID19 pandemic is bringing to the fore the other pre-existing pandemics in our society that we do not have a ‘20 second hand wash’ to break the chain.”¹

In Wales, the NSPCC continues to be here for children and to deliver services. At this time, our key points are:

- Children at risk of abuse and neglect should remain visible during the crisis
- Children are at increased risk of abuse and neglect during the crisis
- Children should be able to access the help and support they need during the crisis

1. Children at risk of abuse and neglect should remain visible during the crisis.

We welcome the focus given by Welsh Government to children at risk of abuse and neglect through the work of the cross departmental working group on vulnerable children and the recent publication of guidance for children’s services during the COVID 19 pandemic, as well as the recent Welsh Government statement on vulnerable children.

With schools closed to most pupils, many vulnerable children are at risk of remaining unseen. Research shows that it takes on average 7.8 years for children to disclose abuse, and that

¹ <https://www.aceawarewales.com/blog/2020/3/30/when-washing-your-hands-will-not-break-the-chain-of-infection-what-is-our-response-to-aces-in-covid-19>

teachers are professionals they disclose to most often. We are concerned that with the lockdown in place, children who are at risk of, or are experiencing abuse and neglect, risk being hidden from services. This is further evidenced by reports we are hearing of a drop in referrals to children's services. We are particularly concerned about the emerging figures that only a small proportion of vulnerable children are taking their places in schools during the lockdown² – we appreciate that social services and schools are doing all they can to keep in touch with at risk children, but their absence makes them far less visible. Additionally, children who are not known to any services but who are living with abuse and neglect do not appear to be eligible for school places at the moment and so are isolated from school and peer support.

Priorities:

- Understanding the impact of the pandemic on the child protection system, for example early intervention, investigation, conferencing, review and courts. We see the National Independent Safeguarding Board as having a key role in this.
- Referral rates regularly monitored and action taken to ensure that all children at risk come to the attention of services.
- The number of vulnerable children attending school regularly monitored and action taken to ensure that schools are able to offer support to those who are not attending

2. Children are at increased risk of abuse and neglect during the lockdown

Sadly, home isn't safe for every child.

Domestic Abuse

In the first 21 days of the UK lockdown two children (along with 14 women) were murdered in the context of domestic abuse³.

1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic violence in the UK. In Wales, during 2018/19 specialist services supported 4,263 children impacted by VAWDASV. In its report 'Children

² <https://gov.wales/attendance-local-authority-settings-during-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-20-april-24-april-2020-html>

³ <https://kareningalasmith.com/counting-dead-women/>

Matter' Welsh Women's Aid ⁴estimated that 18,478 in Wales were impacted by DA in the past year, based on the 1 in 5 estimate. By their calculation, 14,224 (77%) children in Wales received no specialist support and so may not be known to other services and be even more invisible during lockdown.

Perpetrators who use coercive and controlling behaviour use a suite of tactics to gain and maintain power and control; isolation from friends, families and other sources of support is a common tactic used to maintain that power and control and the current 'lockdown' across the UK is working as an enabler for that isolation.

Where families have separated, abuse could escalate if the child is isolated with the abuser. There is also anecdotal evidence from specialist services of abusers refusing to return children to the non-abusing parent due to claims of self-isolation.

Welsh Women's Aid members have confirmed they are continuing to support children via phone calls and some face to face video calls but this is a challenge with younger children. They are continuing to maintain relationships with children and young people, but without confidential spaces their usual in-depth work is not possible and they are concerned about starting difficult conversations with vulnerable children who are then alone without support after the call. Where it is safe to do so, more work is being done to develop resources for the non-abusing parent which they can use with their child. New referrals are very low as other professionals are not seeing children who may need support. The concern is there will be a sudden spike in demand for already stretch services when the lockdown ends.

⁴ <https://www.welshomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Children-and-Young-People-participation-report-FINAL.pdf> - page 14 and 15

Priorities

- We welcome the announcement from the UK Minister for Safeguarding Victoria Atkins of the £3m funding boost for specialist services working with children, particularly the increased support this will provide for services here in Wales. But reiterate the call from NSPCC Cymru/Wales that better resources are needed for dedicated work with all children and young people experiencing and exposed to domestic abuse across Wales, when and where they need it. If as expected, demand for services peaks after the lockdown, the need for this will be even more stark. Services must be supported to prepare for this.
- Headteachers to have discretion over who they offer more support to if they have concerns about families not known to statutory services.

Child Sexual Abuse

The Lucy Faithful Foundation's Stop It Now helpline has seen a 32% decrease in calls since the lockdown and stats from ChildLine indicate a drop-in contacts from 43% to 35% about sexual abuse. This is particularly concerning given the hidden nature of child sexual abuse.

Specialist services working with child survivors of CSA have also raised concerns about the support they are able to offer young children during the lockdown who cannot access video calling independently.

Children who have been sexually abused are also under-represented on child protection plans, we are concerned therefore that they are even more invisible during this time. An estimated 1 in 20 children in the UK have been sexually abused⁵. The vast majority (90%) of children who experience sexual abuse were abused by someone they knew⁶. For children experiencing sexual abuse in the family, they may well be isolating at home with the

Priorities

- Welsh Government and Safeguarding Children Boards to publicise that services to support children are still open for business
- Welsh Government and Safeguarding Children Boards to urge anyone concerned about child sexual abuse to contact the NSPCC Helpline or Stop it Now! Helpline
- Resources to made available for specialist services to continue to support all children and adult survivors now and in the aftermath of lockdown.

⁵ Radford, L. et al. (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today. London: NSPCC.

⁶ Radford, L. et al. (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today. London: NSPCC.

perpetrator of that abuse. We know that it takes children and young people an average of 7 years to disclose abuse, and that some are never able to tell what has happened to them⁷, so they may not be a concern to other adults⁸. We are very concerned about the impact on children being sexually abused in the home, both the immediate impact of the abuse and the long-term trauma. Of course, for children who are being sexually abused, the immediate and long-term impact of this will happen regardless of isolation, but our concern is the lack of access to trusted adults and the risk of the abuse increasing.

Online Abuse

We must be prepared for the Coronavirus pandemic to become a three-fold 'perfect storm' for children and young people - with social networks understandably facing a challenge to maintain their current moderation efforts; children spending more time at home and on devices; and abusers seeing the current crisis as an opportunity to abuse and groom children on social networks and gaming sites.

NSPCC research finds that vulnerable children are much more likely to be targeted by online abusers. Children aged 11-17 that display traits of loneliness and use social media for validation are twice as likely (9 per cent vs 4 per cent) to have sent, received or been asked to send sexual messages to an adult. When it's likely lots of children will be feeling lonely or anxious during self-isolation, we have to assume children will be at far greater susceptibility of abuse.

Social media and gaming sites are proving to be a lifeline for parents and their children as they adapt to being at home, but we must also recognise there are heightened risks. It is now more important than ever for parents and carers to be having regular conversation with their children about what they are doing online.

Priorities:

- Parents, carers, and children and young people to be given enhanced information about how to keep safe online
- Monitor the proportion of online sexual offences against children
- Monitor reports from young people about their experiences online during lockdown.

⁷ Allnock, D. and Miller, P. (2013) No one noticed, no one heard: a study of disclosures of childhood abuse. London: NSPCC

⁸ Miller and Allnock 2013 Allnock, D. and Miller, P. (2013) No one noticed, no one heard: a study of disclosures of childhood abuse. London: NSPCC

The NSPCC's Net Aware website contains information for parents about different social networks and websites, and how to stay safe online. It has recently added articles about video chat and livestreaming services, and the newly-popular Netflix Party extension.

Across Wales NSPCC Cymru/Wales are offering online safety sessions for children and young people aged between 9 and 13 who are looked after and open to Local Authority Children Services. The sessions will look at life online for a young person and how this may be affecting them. Aspects of the work will cover social media, consent, online space, awareness of potential risk and asking for support and help. Additional support will be provided for carers who need that space to explore their worries and concerns and allow some time to gain guidance and support.

With the delivery of support to young people moving predominantly on line, it will be important to keep reviewing the learning to ensure that their needs are met.

The NSPCC and O2 are working in partnership to offer free 30 minute introductory webinars on keeping families safe online. The webinars highlight the risks children can face online whilst offering practical advice and signposting for help and support. To arrange a webinar, please email parentworkshops@nspcc.org.uk

Perinatal Mental Health and infant mental health

Family support programmes and perinatal mental health services are unique – they play a vital role in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of mums, dads/partners and the healthy development of babies, which means they must be protected.

The prevalence of perinatal mental health problems remains, with up to one in five mums and one in ten dads experiencing mental health problems during pregnancy and after birth – and is likely to intensify for some parents as day-to-day routines are disrupted and in-person support from family and friends is not possible.

At this time, nobody should be left to cope with perinatal mental health problems on their own. If left untreated, perinatal mental health problems can have a devastating

impact on mums, dads/partners and babies – both immediately but also long after the COVID-19 situation has passed. It is therefore more critical than ever that all mums and dads/partners still receive consistent care during pregnancy and after birth to enable early identification and support for mental health concerns.

Dedicated health professionals such as midwives, health visitors and perinatal mental health community care teams are rapidly adopting innovative new ways of working and must be enabled to continue this safely. Redeployment of perinatal professionals to support Covid19

should be a **last resort** to ensure all families continue to receive care either virtually or in person.

Priorities

- Welsh Government and Public Health Wales to publicise that services to support perinatal mental health problems are still open for business
- Welsh Government and Public Health Wales to urge any mum or dad/partner concerned about their mental health during the perinatal period to seek support
- Welsh Government to monitor referrals into specialist perinatal mental health teams and address any barriers to women being identified as needing specialist support at this time
- Welsh Government to continue to prioritise perinatal mental health now and in the aftermath of the lockdown, to ensure that mums and their families in Wales can access specialists support when it is needed

Emotional abuse

The NSPCC Helpline has recently seen an increase in calls from adults who are worried about children facing emotional abuse behind closed doors during the lockdown. Across the UK, there has been a rise of 50%, with a fifth of calls since lockdown relating to emotional abuse.

Children are facing threats of violence, being ridiculed, screamed at and verbally abused or manipulated by those who should be protecting them. These figures confirm that there is an increased risk for children vulnerable to abuse and neglect if they are isolated in homes and without the safety net schools offer. Existing abuse can also be intensified by lockdown conditions and many children are left without the safety net of teachers, friends and trusted adults they may usually turn to for support.

That's why it is so important that Welsh Government, children's services, schools and the police do all they can to reach and support these children.

3. Children must be able to access the help they need

Children have been talking to Childline about the issues they struggle with during the COVID 19 crisis.

Counselling sessions about **mental and emotional health** where coronavirus was mentioned have increased as the virus has become more prevalent in the UK.

Young people talk about:

- struggling with increased feelings of depression and anxiety
- having panic attacks more frequently
- having nightmares or finding it difficult to fall asleep
- feeling lonely or isolated.

Young people use the word “trapped” to describe how they feel about being at home, particularly since strict social distancing measures were put in place. Not being able to go to school, visit family or friends or take part in activities outside of the family home is having a negative impact on their mental health.

Some young people tell us they are having suicidal thoughts and feelings and some talk about using self-harm to cope.

We are concerned about reports from young people that they are experiencing a reduction in mental health support.

Young people who have been receiving ongoing support for existing mental health concerns are saying that they are either no longer receiving support or support has been reduced. As a result, some young people feel like their mental health is getting worse.

"I'm going through a lot right now. I feel really anxious about everything. I'm stuck at home and having a horrible time. I feel so upset and lonely. My child and adolescent mental health (CAMHS) appointments have been cancelled because of the Coronavirus. The news has made my mental health worse and now all the schools have been closed there are more arguments at home." (Girl, 16-18)

A small number of counselling sessions have also been from young people receiving ongoing mental health support in hospital. They are distressed because they can no longer receive visitors or have been moved in order to make space for coronavirus patients.

Preparing for post-lockdown

As well as working to ensure children at risk of abuse and neglect are being identified and supported during the lockdown, it is important to start planning for the future

when children start to return to school and have more contact with teachers, health workers and other adults. The experience of other countries suggests that, once the stay at home measures are eased, there is potential for a significant increase in police reports, referrals, demand for support services and cases going to court. By modelling and

anticipating what strains this may place on the child protection system, Welsh Government can plan how will this be mitigated through, for example, increasing social work capacity and resourcing children's services in general and specialist services. It is vital this work starts now so we avoid the coronavirus crisis having a devastating, secondary impact and we make sure children and young people can access the timely, effective support they may need to recover and rebuild their lives. Key to this will be learning from the impact of the pandemic on the child protection system.

<p>Senedd Cymru Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg</p> <p>Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19 ar blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru</p> <p>COV – 23a Ymateb gan: NSPCC Cymru</p>	<p>Welsh Parliament Children, Young People and Education Committee</p> <p>Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on children and young people in Wales</p> <p>COV – 23a Response from: NSPCC Cymru</p>
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Update from NSPCC Helpline

Contacts responded to by the Helpline increased week-on-week during the first 4 weeks after lockdown and have levelled off up to the week ending 3 May. With the NSPCC helpline campaign that started on 4th May (with both press, TV and social media promotion of the service) it is expected calls/ contacts will increase. Plans have been underway to ensure the service is ready for any increases in demand across both voice and non-voice channels. Additional staff resources have been prepared to support callbacks for lower risk contacts. Levels will be closely monitored over the coming weeks to establish the impact of the campaign.

The key trends are:

- The proportion of **contacts resulting in a referral** remains higher since lockdown, compared with pre-lockdown
- The proportion of contacts about some of the top 5 main concerns have increased since lockdown, when compared with pre-lockdown:
 - **emotional abuse** has increased from 10% to 15% since lockdown
 - **parent/adult health/behaviour** has increased from 19% to 24% since lockdown
 - **physical abuse** has increased from 12% to 14% since lockdown
 - **family relationships** has increased from 6% (not in the top 5) to 7% (now in the top 5)

Top 5 main concerns of adults who contacted the Helpline

	Pre-lockdown 6 Jan – 22 March	Since lockdown 23 March – 3 May
Parent/Adult Health/Behaviour	19%	24%
Emotional Abuse	10%	15%
Neglect	14%	14%
Physical Abuse	12%	14%
Family Relationships	6% (not in top 5)	7%
Sexual Abuse (contact)	11%	7% (not in top 5)

Contacts from people worried about parent/adult health/behaviour:

Domestic abuse, adult substance misuse and adult mental health are 3 of the sub-concerns that sit under other main concerns.

Update from Childline

For the week 27th April – 3rd May 2020, the service received a slight increase in voice calls compared to the previous week and a slight decrease in chat/ e mails, but contacts remain largely in line with post lockdown levels which have seen some fluctuation week on week.

Between the 10 January and 3 May 2020, Childline delivered **6,185 counselling sessions** to children and young people who **specifically mentioned Coronavirus** or associated terms. The key trends are:

- There was a weekly increase in the number of counselling sessions for the first 5 weeks after lockdown.
- The proportions of counselling about **mental health, suicidal thoughts and feelings**, and **family relationships** (the top 3 main concerns) have all increased since lockdown.
- This week (27 April- 3 May) counselling sessions about **school or education problems** reappeared in the top 10 for the first time since lockdown.

Counselling sessions about school or education problems

Nearly half of young people's concerns were about workloads. Young people talked about feeling stressed because they were:

- getting behind with school work / not performing as well as have done previously
- finding it hard to concentrate because of too many distractions at home
- finding it difficult to motivate themselves

Some young people talked about their workload being more than they are used to or more difficult. Some talked about not getting the right support from their parents with some parents being too critical and adding to the pressure, whilst others provided no support at all.

Counselling sessions about abuse

In the week ending 3rd May, the number of abuse counselling sessions slightly decreased compared to the previous week. However the trends remained similar to last week with emotional and physical abuse increased and sexual abuse decreased compared to pre-lockdown levels.

Childline Online

Children and young people are also visiting the Childline website which offers a wide range of information, advice and resources including the art box, games, mood journal, calm zone and message boards. The website is an important part of the overall Childline service, with increasing importance since the change to the operating hours.

It is clear from the website statistics that children and young people are increasingly turning to the site for information, tools and resources to help them with their questions, concerns and anxieties and the service are increasingly promoting the tools and information as additional support to be accessed following a contact through one of the channels.

The online team have been maintaining the corona virus content which went live on 18th March. Demand to this section saw an initial peak around 24th March at approximately 2,000 pageviews per day this then gradually dropped levelling out to between 500 and 700 pageviews per day. Spikes in demand correlate to Instagram stories referring directly to updates to the content.

Our self-help tools such as Message Board, Ask Sam and the Calm Zone are also key areas at the moment and so monitoring and management of these moderated areas has been extended. Our Message Boards are a popular way for children and young people to support each other and share their own situations, this area of the site has seen significant growth since the start of the pandemic restrictions. Levels in February were around 700 posts and replies published each

week. Week on week through March and April the number of Message Boards submissions approved (posts and replies) has grown incrementally reaching 1,288 submissions for the current week. Similarly, the views of the Message Board pages have also seen increases with a particularly notable 30% increase in the week following the closure of schools. Weekly levels are now exceeding 38,000 pageviews.

Our Calm Zone, which is promoted on the website home page has seen dramatic increases in views of its pages. The tool which was a new addition to the site in December provides children and young people with a range of activities and tools that they can use 'to help them feel better when they are anxious, scared or sad'. These include breathing exercises, yoga and games. Levels in early March were at around 2,400 pageviews and this increased to over 8,000 for week commencing 23rd March and over 9,000 in the week up to the 4th April, these settled around 6,000 pageviews per week. This then saw further increase and the last two weeks have recorded around 10,000 pageviews per week.

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Introduction

The health crisis and the lockdown period have, inevitably, precipitated additional stresses and challenges for children and young people. The combination of the pandemic and sudden, challenging changes to family economic circumstances have been frightening and destabilising. We have been as deeply concerned as others about the safety of children we now only see online, or on a phone screen. We have worried about those we are not hearing about that will be at risk or in real danger.

Barnardo's, like many other organisations, has adapted service support and interventions to be suitable for delivery online or over the phone during the Covid-19 crisis. We are aware that much of this adaptation is just sticking plaster until face to face work can recommence. However we are also alert to the fact that there is learning in this crisis that must be captured, to future proof our work with children, young people and families in the longer term.

Some children and young people have experienced respite from factors that negatively impact on their wellbeing. Issues such as bullying, anxiety inducing social environments for autistic children, and negative peer pressure and intimidation in the community for those at risk of criminal exploitation have been removed. There have been different opportunities to engage with online education and online groups, which would have been hard to get to, or hard to manage in their physical manifestation. Parents and carers, who previously worked long hours or were preoccupied, have been available for their children. Barnardo's has set up a focused Innovation Programme with four project work streams to harness this learning going forward.

Physical and mental health of children and young people:

1. ***Children have lost access to supportive social networks, which has undermined their sense of wellbeing and exacerbated some existing emotional and mental health issues.*** Older young people have been particularly vulnerable to the isolation, especially care leavers and those living

away from family. Being at home with family, particularly where there have been longstanding difficulties in relationships, has created tensions and resulted in increases in youth homelessness. Our First Episode Psychosis Service in Cardiff (FEPS) and our Golau Service on Anglesey both address the emotional resilience of young people through interventions which include socialising, friendships and meaningful contact with others. These interventions are clearly difficult to access currently, so both these services have adapted their service offers to maximise the support they can give by reaching out to individuals and families.

2. ***In relation to Covid-19*** - Children are concerned about the safety of family members and families are anxious about going out, going shopping and to local services such as GP surgeries. ***Economic security*** - Families where economic pressures have come in the wake of the health crisis have experienced increased levels of tension and stress played out in arguments, heightened displays of emotions and parental alcohol misuse.
3. Where the source of a child's mental health problems was located in social or academic aspects of school life, these children have experienced a respite which has benefited their mental health in the short term. We envisage that a return to school will prove particularly challenging for these children and additional support and careful planning will be required to facilitate this.
4. In some families, where parents have previously worked long hours and are now furloughed, or are not working, time has been spent together providing an opportunity to strengthen relationships with their children.

Vulnerable and disadvantaged children:

1. The ***economic impact*** of the crisis has been a huge source of anxiety as work has been lost and families have had to claim Universal Credit. Children are directly impacted by living with this anxiety and fear and the very real threats to the security of house and home.
2. In services where we support families with ***children with special educational needs*** we have experienced a range of issues. Children and young people on the autistic spectrum, or with learning difficulties, have struggled with the changes of routine arising from their school closing and their education and care moving to school hubs. Many have found it challenging to understand what is happening and what it means for them and their families. It has been very difficult for families caring for these children and young people to have them home during the lockdown with little routine and the brief respite of school and support services. Children and families are missing the hours of weekly 'respite' when children were accessing support groups and individual support via the

service. Some children and young people, who had trouble engaging with 'live' groups and learning, have been easier to access via online routes.

3. Our services are **working with multi-agency partners** in localities to support these families. Some Early Help Hubs have adapted to address emergency food need, delivering school meals to homes etc. Our services have supported families to access school meals and food banks as part of this joint work. In areas where our services have lost the professional groupings that usually make the referrals, service managers have reached out to key professionals to re-design the referral routes and/or publicised our services directly to families so that they can self-refer.
4. The pandemic has exposed the vulnerable families who do not having **access to digital technology** beyond a basic phone. Barnardo's Cymru have been using voluntary funds to provide technology such as smartphones so that families can remain in touch, pay their bills and manage the practicalities of their changed circumstances. Services have also been supporting families to access equipment for their children from schools and supporting families with setting up internet connection and purchasing stationary and providing access to printers.
5. Vulnerable **single parents** and families where there is shared parenting have experienced pressures and challenges. Single parents are more reliant on extended family, friends and services for support in raising their children.
6. **Young carers** have been affected by a variety of issues ranging from adapting to deterioration in the health of family members, economic challenges due to loss of parental income and digital exclusion challenging their ability to connect to learning. However overall young carers have been temporarily relieved from keeping on top of both the demands of domestic chores and caring for a loved one at home combined with school work.

Social care and safeguarding:

1. Our services are experiencing a general reduction in referrals which is a grave concern from a safeguarding perspective, possibly due in part to schools being closed and the usual professional network not being around the child or young person. There has been an increase in some of our family support services.
2. Delivering services via **online and telephone communication has compromised the ability to safeguard robustly**. Even when children are seen or spoken to separately from their parents and carers it's harder to judge how they are being cared for and the quality of the relationship with the

parent. Services have attempted to create opportunities for private conversations with children and young people within the context of lockdown.

3. Some users of ***schools counselling services, and Families First counselling services***, have been happy to continue to access the support online or on the phone. However, those that are now at home will not always have the same degree of privacy they had at school. Moreover, as school counselling is a confidential service, where older children can get support without the need to gain consent from parents, then this opportunity to report safeguarding issues has been lost.
4. We are concerned about ***rising levels of domestic violence*** and welcome the Welsh Governments recent 'Home shouldn't be a place of fear' campaign. ***We know that children will be experiencing abuse in these households*** and that awareness of this is being promoted via the NSPCC's Childline campaign. We recently received additional funding from the Home Office to run our family approach to domestic abuse in four LA's in Gwent, in addition to Newport. We expect to see increased referrals into these services in the longer term – though at the moment referrals remain low.
5. School hubs were intended to facilitate support for the most vulnerable pupils and clearly there has been concern that attendance has been low. Families are concerned to keep their children, and themselves, safe from the virus. ***From a safeguarding perspective it's important that we get children back into schools***, but clearly there is a complicated balance of health considerations to address alongside this imperative. We are concerned that some families may use Covid-19 to keep the social workers and services from the door.
6. Young people accessing our Divert service in Newport, which supports those at high risk of entering the criminal justice system, have had the opportunity to stay indoors with family. Some have re-engaged with their education. The lockdown seems to have been favourable for the safety of this cohort. Whether some of this gain can be sustained as restrictions ease is unclear.
7. We are concerned about the increase in exposure of children and young people to potential online abuse.

Key points:

As we emerge from this period we envisage the emotional and mental health fallout for children, young people and their families will be significant. In a recent survey of nearly 1,000 Barnardo's UK practitioners on the impact of Covid-19, 69% said they are supporting someone experiencing an increase in mental health issues due to Covid-19. This included anxiety, stress, sleep

dysregulation, depression, reduced self-esteem, OCD behaviours, paranoia and self-harm.

Government should think ahead about the best way of ensuring holistic, agile responses are in place to address this need, which is likely to fall outside the remit of CAMH services and the level of provision that can be made available at school. We believe a keener focus on acknowledging the value of systemic approaches which consider family circumstances, both material and relational, and their impact on children's wellbeing will be required going forward.

Those made vulnerable by poverty and its related insecurity, children with disabilities and those with emotional and behavioural issues are most likely to have been losing ground developmentally and educationally prior to the crisis. Their future outcomes will have been disproportionately affected by the crisis. How will this cohort be supported going forward, not only in the immediate 'return' phase but in the longer term? We have an opportunity to re-think how we create more inclusive models of education, which may involve continuing online learning from home, or smaller groups outside the main school, as part of a re-designed learning approach going forward.

The enforced slowing down of family life has reaped some valuable rewards for some families. Relationships have had a chance to deepen and wellbeing has improved. Long and irregular working hours are known to not be conducive to healthy family life. We know there is often value, particularly for some children in low income families, in accessing childcare settings. However we are also learning more about the importance, in terms of children's development, of healthy attachments with primary care givers. The wellbeing of post-pandemic future generations may require a conversation, which isn't primarily driven by the economic imperative, about work, family life and childcare.

Despite the attention and investment Welsh Government has provided to address digital inclusion historically, the pandemic has revealed gaps in access, which will have been impacting on families over time. Just as digital education is poised to be part of the core curriculum in Wales, access to digital in homes, it seems, should be on par with access to key utilities such as energy and water. Addressing digital inequalities requires considerably more attention going forward.

Agenda Item 5

<p>Senedd Cymru Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg</p> <p>Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19 ar blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru</p> <p>COV – 59 Ymateb gan: Penaethiaid Gwasanaethau Plant yng Nghymru</p>	<p>Welsh Parliament Children, Young People and Education Committee</p> <p>Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on children and young people in Wales</p> <p>COV - 59 Response from: Heads of Children Services in Wales</p>
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- We would like to extend our thanks and praise to all of our foster carers, social workers, residential workers, social care workers and support workers who have shown the strength of the social care workforce in Wales at its' best from the beginning of this challenging period. The commitment and integrity that we have seen to support, safeguard and care for children in Wales has been impressive.
- We would like to bring to attention concerns for disabled children during this period. We are aware that a number of families in our Local Authorities are under tremendous pressure. A high volume of disabled children have underlying health conditions which places them in the shielding category and therefore it is difficult for them to attend care provision during this time. We are concerned regarding the impact on disabled children and young people in the medium and longer term as the usual services that they would have received over the Summer holidays for example by way of Summer play schemes will be greatly reduced. They will also possibly be the last cohort of children who return to their schools due to the need to prioritise health issues.
- We are satisfied that there is synergy within Local Authorities Children's Services in relation to fulfilling statutory duties. We are confident that we are prioritising these duties across Wales. However, we have concerns regarding inconsistencies from other provision who would normally support the Local Authority in undertaking their statutory duties.
- Domestic Violence – some parts of Wales have seen an increase in the number of domestic violence referrals and we have concerns regarding the longer term impact on children in these circumstances during lockdown
- We are confident to say that Children's Services in Wales have coped and are coping well currently whilst we respond to the emergency situation. We are however concerned regarding the medium and longer term impact on children's services when we enter the recovery and the 'new normal' period.

Kirsty Williams MS, Minister for Education

Vaughan Gething MS, Minister for Health and Social Services

Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services

Dyddiad | Date: 12 May 2020

Pwnc | Subject: **CYPE Committee scrutiny of the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people**

Dear Ministers,

Thank you for appearing before the Committee on **28 April** and **5 May** to answer our questions about the actions you have taken to date to manage the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people.

The **Annex** to this letter highlights the areas on which we request further detail and/or reassurance at this stage in the pandemic. It is not an exhaustive list of the issues we consider important; rather, our intention is to provide feedback to the Welsh Government, at pace, on the areas we believe require more attention. It is written based on information available in the public domain as at 11 May 2020.

Our work to scrutinise the actions being taken to manage the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people will continue over the weeks ahead. As only a limited number of public meetings are available to us at the moment, we have prioritised the following areas for sessions with stakeholders:

- support for vulnerable children (Monday 18 May);
- support for the physical and mental health of children and young people (Tuesday 9 June);
- support for the higher and further education sector (Tuesday 23 June).

We have also reserved one session (Tuesday 7 July) to explore any clear themes arising from our **rolling call for views**.

While we recognise that children and young people currently appear to be less susceptible to the virus than adults, there is little doubt that the wider effects of Covid-19—and the measures taken to manage it—have impacted their lives significantly. Our aim in undertaking this scrutiny is to explore these impacts and mitigate the risks associated with them as quickly and effectively as possible. We will share with you on a regular basis the findings and views we draw from the evidence we receive.

Kind regards,



Lynne Neagle MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg | We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



ANNEX

1. Vulnerable children

On 1 May the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services issued a written statement detailing the steps taken to support children and young people and maintain their safety.

While we welcome the range of steps outlined in the statement to support children and young people, we remain particularly concerned about the visibility of—and support available for—our most vulnerable children. The relatively low number of children considered vulnerable attending hubs and schools currently restricts the education system’s ability to fulfil its normal role as a safeguarding safety net. As such, we welcome the Minister for Education’s reference to the cross-governmental approach adopted to date and believe this is essential if we are to avoid important (and potentially grave) issues being missed.¹

Responding to our concerns about maintaining contact with and supporting vulnerable children and their families, the Deputy Minister stated:

“...we've now got 890 vulnerable children attending school settings, and that's the highest number that we've had at all since the opening of the scheme. But it's still only a tiny drop in the ocean. But it's very good, and it is progress that the numbers attending are now going up.

But, of course, there are a lot of children who are not attending school and the social services are not necessarily seeing. There has been a drop in safeguarding referrals to social services. Those numbers are now beginning to go up, but there certainly was a significant drop, which is a great deal of concern. One local authority, in fact, reported a drop of 27 per cent in terms of safeguarding referrals compared to this time last year.”²

We believe further details need to be provided publicly to demonstrate a robust approach to identifying and supporting our most vulnerable children and young people, particularly during any period in which schools and other education settings remain closed to the majority. This is particularly important in relation to those children who may be vulnerable but not engaged with statutory services. We have prioritised the issue of support for vulnerable children for our first public evidence session with stakeholders on 18 May and will write to you in due course with our findings.

We would also welcome an update on the wider, more flexible definition of vulnerable children the Deputy Minister indicated would follow after the session on 5 May.³

2. Special educational needs and education otherwise than at school

The challenges of maintaining provision for those with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) as part of widespread school closures was acknowledged by the Minister for Education.⁴ **We would welcome further detail of the specific arrangements being put in place for SEN pupils’ continuing learning given that:**

¹ Record of Proceedings, para 39, 28 April 2020.

² Record of Proceedings, paras 78-79, 5 May 2020.

³ Record of Proceedings, para 85, 5 May 2020.

⁴ Record of Proceedings, paras 41-42, 28 April 2020.



- they may have a physical condition which, although they are vulnerable and should be entitled to attend school, means they cannot on medical grounds;
- they are likely to find distance learning more difficult than other pupils as they rely more on one-to-one and/or face-to-face teaching.

The [Coronavirus Act 2020](#) gives the Welsh Ministers powers to relax statutory duties on local authorities and schools temporarily. **We would welcome:**

- an outline of the Welsh Government’s view on whether it anticipates a need to use these powers in response to local authorities and schools being unable to continue delivering provision, particularly in relation to arrangements specified in SEN statements, in practice;
- if so, an outline of the checks and balances that would be put in place to ensure that any relaxation of duties to make provision is proportionate and does not detract from the importance of SEN pupils continuing their learning.

Arrangements for the maintenance of provision for those who are educated otherwise than at school (EOTAS) were also mentioned briefly in our session on 28 April.⁵ **We would welcome an outline of the arrangements in place across Wales for EOTAS provision, and the steps in place to monitor and address any disparity of provision.**

3. Mental health and well-being

The mental health and well-being of our children and young people is a key priority for our committee work. While we have paused our follow-up work on our Mind over Matter report to enable public services to focus efforts on managing the impact of Covid-19, we believe that steps to support our children’s mental health and well-being are more important now than ever.

To this end, we have prioritised the issue of support for the physical and mental health and well-being of our children and young people for our second public evidence session with stakeholders on 9 June and will write to you in due course with our findings.

4. Children’s Rights Impact Assessments

Our Committee view about the importance of Children’s Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) is well documented, and demonstrated by our recent inquiry into children’s rights. While the publication of our report has been paused to enable public services to focus efforts on managing the impact of Covid-19, we believe that assessing the impact of current measures relating to the management of Covid-19 on children’s rights is essential.

We recognise that the urgent pace at which emergency legislation was passed limited the ability of the Welsh Government to undertake a CRIA at the time it sought the then-Assembly’s legislative consent. However, sufficient time has now passed to enable the Welsh Government to undertake an assessment of the impact on children of *all* measures—not just those decisions relating directly to children’s services—taken to manage Covid-19. **We welcome officials’ confirmation that a “full suite”⁶ of impact**

⁵ Record of Proceedings, [para 46](#), 28 April 2020.

⁶ Record of Proceedings, [para 114](#), 5 May 2020.



assessments is being prepared and urge the Welsh Government to make these assessments— including CRIs—publicly available as soon as possible.

5. Childcare

We welcome the steps taken by the Welsh Government to repurpose the childcare funding offer to support the coronavirus childcare assistance scheme, enabling critical workers and families with vulnerable children to have free access to childcare aged 0 to 5. Nevertheless, the currently complex funding situation for childcare providers, and the risks posed to the viability of the sector by the Covid-19 outbreak and measures taken to manage it, were explored in our session on 5 May. We note the Deputy Minister’s comment that the impact on the sector is “very worrying” and welcome her confirmation that steps are being taken to seek to resolve current challenges.⁷

We urge the Welsh Government to publish, as a matter of priority, details about how funding arrangements will be managed to avoid certain childcare providers being unable to access support.

6. Higher education

We note the Minister for Education’s [written statement](#) and [press release](#) of 4 May providing more detail on the Welsh Government’s policy in relation to higher education.

We would welcome further detail about:

- **student maintenance arrangements for the next academic year (2020/21) for those who have to learn remotely and who, under existing rules, would drop to the level of support provided for students “living with parents”;**
- **any assessment the Welsh Government has made of the impact significant changes to teaching and accommodation made by universities and private accommodation providers has had on students’ consumer and legal rights, and any steps take to support students in understanding their rights.**

We recognise the Minister’s acknowledgment in her statement of 4 May that “the financial impact of the crisis on universities is substantial”. We believe that this has the potential to have a severe and damaging long-term effect on this important sector. We anticipate that further support from government is very likely to be required, but recognise that devolved budgets will require wider support from HM Treasury.

We would welcome:

- **an update on the work undertaken to date, and planned to be undertaken, both within the Welsh Government and between the Welsh and UK Governments, to identify options for financial support for the sector;**
- **an indication of when the Welsh Government anticipates being able to provide clarity about outcomes for post-16 education and HEFCW funding allocations for 2020-21.**

This information will be used to inform our third public evidence session with stakeholders on 23 June which we have set aside to give priority consideration to the impact of Covid-19 on higher and further education.

⁷ Record of Proceedings, [para 137](#), 5 May 2020.



7. Continuity of learning

We welcome the steps taken to date by schools to maintain continuity of learning for their pupils. Nevertheless, the challenges posed by the measures necessary to manage Covid-19 have inevitably impacted on our children and young people's learning. **We would be particularly grateful for an outline of the steps the Welsh Government has taken to monitor/address the following:**

- **the arrangements in place to support parents/guardians in undertaking home schooling, including steps taken to ensure that all separated parents are fully informed/supported;**
- **steps taken to ensure that children do not fall through the net in terms of engagement with education, and that schools are checking on their pupils;**
- **the arrangements in place to monitor any difficulties or inconsistencies emerging in how the key worker criteria is applied in accepting children into schools (including how many cases have there been where children have not been accepted despite parents wanting to send them to school);**
- **the extent to which support for home learning can be – and is being – tailored to account for learners' different needs, aptitudes and circumstances.**

7.1 Digital provision and inequalities

We recognise that digital exclusion poses a significant risk of exacerbating existing inequalities. As such, we welcome the Minister for Education's [announcement](#) on 29 April 2020 of funding to help local authorities to support digitally excluded learners during the current pandemic. **We would welcome an outline of the steps the Welsh Government is taking to:**

- **monitor and address any inconsistencies in approaches across local authorities to providing support for the digitally excluded;**
- **explore the other non-digital risks (for example housing, other resources, and parental capacity) that could exacerbate inequalities during this pandemic.**

7.2 Phased return to school and the five principles

We note the Minister for Education's clear [statement](#) on 7 May that schools will not return to normal provision on 1 June 2020, and that the [five principles set out on 28 April](#) will guide the Welsh Government's approach to a phased return. We believe that it is essential that messaging relating to the return of our children and young people to school is clear and that the sector itself is consulted in advance of any plans being published. **We request that the Committee is kept informed with regular updates on the Welsh Government's thinking and proposed approach to any phased return to school, and assessments undertaken against the five principles.**

We also believe that the availability of testing is key to plans for a safe phased return to school, and note the low number of teachers (15) who had been tested by 28 April 2020.⁸ **We would welcome an update on the Welsh Government's approach to testing of school staff as part of any phased return to school.**

⁸ Record of Proceedings, [para 34](#), 28 April 2020.



8. Vocational qualifications

Vocational qualifications were raised briefly in our session on 28 April.⁹

We recognise that the situation in relation to vocational qualifications is complex due to the fact that they are awarded by over 100 bodies working across the UK. We also note that Qualifications Wales has stated that, to ensure consistency for learners taking these qualifications, the same approach will be taken for learners in Wales as that set out by Ofqual for England.

We are aware that Ofqual's consultation on arrangements for vocational qualifications has recently closed. **We would welcome an update from the Welsh Government on the approach for Wales once Ofqual has set out the common approach, and are keen to see a similar level of clarity for vocational learners as those sitting general education qualifications.**

⁹ Record of Proceedings, paras 84-86, 28 April 2020.

