

## **Understanding & learning from responses to the COVID-19 lockdown in schools and children's social care**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion.

### **Summary**

The LGA commissioned Isos Partnership (IP) to conduct research into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of children's services, education and social care. Staff from IP will be joining the meeting to present their initial findings, recommendations and next steps.

### **Recommendation**

That the members of the Children & Young People Board discuss the report and its findings.

### **Action**

Officers to proceed in line with members comments.

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## Understanding and learning from responses to the Covid-19 lockdown in schools and children's social care

The Covid-19 pandemic, and the associated closure of schools to all but a minority of pupils, have led to rapid and unprecedented changes in how education and children's social care are delivered. Local authorities have been at the heart of coordinating local responses to these challenges. The LGA has therefore commissioned Isos Partnership to undertake this research, with the following key objectives:

- a. understand how councils and schools have responded to the challenges posed by Covid-19 in relation to education and safeguarding children;
- b. consider how education leaders, children's social care, children, families and carers have all adapted and responded both to the challenges and new ways of working;
- c. explore how different partners within the local area have worked together during this period, including (but not limited to) the role of schools acting as the 'eyes and ears' of the child safeguarding system; and
- d. develop an evidence base for councils and their partners to draw on going forward as they seek to embed the good practice that has developed and address fresh challenges in the future.

Eight local authorities have been recruited to take part in this research: Brent, Hackney, Gateshead, Leicester City, Lincolnshire, Staffordshire, Stockport and Swindon. Between them they provide a broad and representative sample in terms of deprivation, rurality, extent of academisation, underlying levels of children's social care need and exposure to the impact of the Covid pandemic. The research has been structured in two main phases, with phase one consisting of initial interviews with Directors of Children's Services and/or other senior council officers. Phase two will broaden the engagement out to include elected members, a wider range of senior officers, headteachers, and those engaged in delivering children's social care. At the end of phase two there will be an opportunity to bring participating local areas together in a virtual round table discussion.

The session today reports the findings from this research at the end of Phase 1. Isos Partnership will provide an overview of how local systems have responded to the pandemic, some of the factors that have influenced the nature of their response, the challenges and opportunities that have arisen and some of the long-term implications for education and children's social care.

The session will also be an opportunity to add to and refine the evidence collected so far, with the reflections of the lead members attending. There will be a significant proportion of the event dedicated to a discussion on the following questions:

1. Reflecting back on the actions that your local area has taken to respond to the pandemic since February, what have been the key successes and what has proved most challenging?
2. Are there new ways of working in education or children's social care that have emerged over the last nine months which you will look to embed going forwards?
3. What do you think the long-term implications are for children, young people and families, and what therefore does this mean for the role of local authorities in supporting them?