

## How local systems are responding to the Covid-19 pandemic

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### Update for the Children & Young People's Board

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# A summary of our key messages when we last updated you

<b>How local areas have responded</b>	<p>Response in three broad phases.</p> <p><b>Phase 1:</b> <u>Initial response</u> to the pandemic, managing the transition to the first national lockdown.</p> <p><b>Phase 2:</b> <u>Adapting to the conditions of lockdown</u> – immediate practicalities, planning for recovery.</p> <p><b>Phase 3:</b> <u>“New normal”</u> – living with and adapting to the pandemic and its impact.</p>
<b>Factors that have shaped local areas’ responses</b>	<p>Local areas that were most confident about their initial response identified three key factors.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b><u>Strong relationships</u></b> between LA and schools, between education and children’s services.</li><li>2. <b><u>Trust</u></b>, experience of <b><u>collaborative working</u></b> on system-wide issues, mature <b><u>partnership structures</u></b>.</li><li>3. <b><u>Confidence in the local system’s capacity to deliver</u></b> and the quality of local support.</li></ol>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b><u>National-local tensions</u></b> – perception of a lack of trust, dialogue; overly-centralised; timeliness.</li><li>• <b><u>Balancing care and learning</u></b> – initial emphasis on safety; variable experiences of learning.</li><li>• <b><u>Partnership decision-making</u></b> – avoiding duplication, ensuring joined-up, whole-system response.</li><li>• <b><u>System fatigue</u></b> – resilience of staff and leaders; pressure on institutions due to staff isolating.</li></ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<p>There were three sets of opportunities highlighted to us.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b><u>New modes of communication</u></b> – virtual ways of working opening up new means of engaging.</li><li>2. <b><u>Transformative projects</u></b> – especially related to Covid-19 response (SEND, emotional wellbeing).</li><li>3. <b><u>Responsibility for the most vulnerable</u></b> – stronger shared responsibility for vulnerable children.</li></ol>
<b>Implications for local systems</b>	<p><b><u>For children’s services and education</u></b> – shared understanding of vulnerable children, and appreciation of the need for a holistic response. Increased demand – learning gaps, early help, children’s services.</p> <p><b><u>For local government</u></b> – DCSs highlighted the essential role of LAs as champions of vulnerable children, conveners of partnerships, commissioners of services in local systems’ responses to the pandemic.</p>

The above provides a summary of what we presented in our session with you at the NCAS Conference in November. The slides from our previous session are attached for reference.

# Additional messages we have heard during our latest engagements

How local areas have responded	Factors that have shaped local areas' responses	Challenges	Opportunities	Implications for local systems
<p><b>Messages from our initial engagements</b></p>	<p>Response in three broad phases.</p> <p><b>Phase 1:</b> <u>Initial response</u> to the pandemic, managing the transition to the first national lockdown.</p> <p><b>Phase 2:</b> <u>Adapting</u> to the conditions of lockdown – immediate practicalities, planning for recovery.</p> <p><b>Phase 3:</b> <u>“New normal”</u> – living with and adapting to the pandemic and its impact.</p>			
<p><b>Additional messages</b></p>	<p><b>We have continued to hear about a “common core” to how local areas have responded</b>, reflecting the singular and unifying nature of the crisis. Nevertheless, <b>the implications of the pandemic period for different parts of the local education and children’s services systems have been different.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><u>Children’s social care</u></b> – role not altered fundamentally, but need to adapt delivery (implications of virtual working, balancing with face-to-face engagements, teamwork). Greater focus on risk assessment and professional judgement (who we engage, when, how).</li> <li>• <b><u>Early help</u></b> – in some local areas, an adaptation to play a more flexible, community-facing role (food parcels, outdoor space for families). Some differences in how early help us used, depending on existing offer – e.g. differences in the role of health visitors and focus on early years / parenting. (One local area paused early help support, saw demand for social care rise, and then reversed.)</li> <li>• <b><u>Schools</u></b> – changes to LA-school relationship (more relational, supportive), with schools’ having to play an expanded community role (community hubs, additional role around test-and-trace).</li> </ul> <p><b>We have also heard about implications for role of elected members and school governors</b> – less direct role in the initial response (due to urgency of decision-making), but support and reflection on impact / implications, steering in the adaptation and new normal phases.</p>			

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<b>Messages from our initial engagements</b>	<p>Local areas that were most confident about their initial response identified three key factors.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b><u>Relationships</u></b> between LA and schools, between education and children's services.</li><li>2. <b><u>Trust</u></b>, experience of <b><u>collaborative working</u></b> on system-wide issues, mature <b><u>partnership structures</u></b>.</li><li>3. <b><u>Confidence in the local system's capacity to deliver</u></b> and the quality of local support.</li></ol>
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<b>Additional messages</b>	<p>The local areas that were most positive about their system's response to the pandemic described three key conditions that had helped them to mount a swift response to the pandemic.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b><u>Strong shared values</u></b> and an ethos of collective, collaborative working on system-wide issues.</li><li>2. <b><u>Strong relationships</u></b> and <b><u>trust</u></b>, underpinned by <b><u>mature partnership structures</u></b>.</li><li>3. <b><u>Capacity to deliver</u></b> swiftly, effectively on key practical challenges facing the system.</li></ol> <p><b>They argued that having these conditions in place had meant the response to the pandemic had required an <u>evolution</u>, rather than the <u>creation</u> of an entirely new way of working. It has been possible – and indeed necessary for some areas – to attempt to create these conditions anew. Leaders in local areas considered that it had been a smoother transition to the pandemic response where these conditions had been in place already. Key = the pandemic has required a system-wide response.</b></p> <p><b><u>On a practical level</u></b>, local areas also highlighted (a) strong business continuity systems, (b) strong IT infrastructure to support flexible working, and (c) capacity to develop consistent enabling protocols (visits, access to learning, procurement of PPE, access to office space) and to provide advice (public health, health and safety) as important enablers.</p>
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<b>Additional messages</b>	<p><b>Our most recent engagements have underscored, but also expanded, these initial findings.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><u>National-local tensions</u></b> – Ongoing frustration re: timeliness of communications and decisions from central government. Avoid “compliance culture” (quantifiable activity vs quality of engagement).</li> <li>• <b><u>Balancing care and quality of learning</u></b> – recognition of the need to focus on safety in the initial lockdown period, but now seeing the size of some learning gaps. Particular concerns for pupils with SEND (separated from support structures during lockdown) and vulnerable families.</li> <li>• <b><u>Partnership-based decision-making</u></b> – (a) Challenges of setting consistent expectations and understanding across services working with same families, using same buildings. (b) Challenges around integrated working, especially with health services – e.g. where health staff re-deployed.</li> <li>• <b><u>System fatigue</u></b> – (a) Extreme fatigue, risk of burnout (leadership / decision fatigue; isolation; workload) and succession (staff recruitment, school leader pipeline). (b) Practical challenges for children’s services teams – access to office space, supervision, morale, integrated working.</li> </ul> <p><b>We have also heard about two other long-term challenges</b> – (a) financial implications (both families suffering hardship, as well as the costs of the Covid-19 response for schools and councils), and (b) long-term needs (learning, families) and maintaining a pro-active, early intervention offer to support them.</p>
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<p><b>Messages from our initial engagements</b></p>	<p>There were three sets of opportunities highlighted to us.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b><u>New modes of communication</u></b> – virtual ways of working opening up new means of engaging.</li> <li>2. <b><u>Transformative projects</u></b> – especially related to Covid-19 response (SEND, emotional wellbeing).</li> <li>3. <b><u>Responsibility for the most vulnerable</u></b> – stronger shared responsibility for vulnerable children.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Additional messages</b></p>	<p>Again, our latest engagements have echoed these original points, but also provided extra detail.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b><u>New modes of communication</u></b> → <b><u>Strong endorsement of virtual working</u></b> – significant opportunities in both education (blended learning, greater flexibility, better engagement for certain groups of pupils – e.g. disengaged, school-refusers, pupils requiring alternative provision) and children’s services (using hybrid models for meetings – child protection conferences, Family Time, care visits; challenges around privacy, family networks) ... but needs codifying.</li> <li>2. <b><u>Transformative projects</u></b> → <b><u>Continued or accelerated strategic and transformation work</u></b>, especially where there is a connection to Covid-19 responses. For some areas, this period has presented a window of opportunity for a “reset” of some services to enable a more pro-active, preventative approach – e.g. the role of alternative provision due to the reduction in permanent exclusions; a more greater enabling role for early help; care placement stability.</li> <li>3. <b><u>Responsibility for vulnerable children</u></b> → <b><u>Strengthened connections</u></b> – between schools, with communities and families, and with councils. This has strengthened relationships and partnerships, but has also exposed levels of deprivation and digital isolation not visible previously. Many school leaders are proud of how they have served their communities during this period.</li> </ol>

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<b>Additional messages</b>	<p>Through our engagements this term, we have developed a clearer picture about the nature of demand that local children's services and education systems have been experiencing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><u>Increase in elective home education</u></b> – mostly coming from parental anxiety about health risks (also some positive experiences of home educating; some disengaged / challenged families).</li> <li>• <b><u>Increased demand for social care</u></b> – slower movement of cases (delays with family courts, fewer cases stepped down), demand from lockdown months and usual demand coming together in Sept-Nov → pressure on caseloads, provision (foster placements), costs (independent placements).</li> <li>• <b><u>Increased demand for early help</u></b> – bottom-up demand, with but families previously not known to support services now not coping (financial hardship, family pressures), rather than cases stepped down from statutory services. Concerns about lack of contact with families of very young children.</li> <li>• <b><u>Concerns about learning gaps, especially for pupils with SEND</u></b> – less of their support replicable at home during lockdown, concerns about increased gaps in learning and long-term impact.</li> <li>• <b><u>Uncovered levels of deprivation</u></b> – economic, digital. <i>'I know [local area] was poor, but I have been shocked. I have learned how poor some people in our community really are.'</i> (Headteacher)</li> </ul>
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<b>Additional messages</b>	<p><b>The pandemic has provided a stark reminder of the necessary inter-connected nature of local systems.</b> As we noted (p.4), mounting an effective response to the pandemic has required a system-wide response. <i>'Local education systems are partnerships between schools and the LA.'</i> (Headteacher)</p> <p><b>One of the key elements to having a strong local system, with the conditions we described above (p.4), is having a strong local authority</b> playing the role of champion (values), convener (relationships and partnerships) and commissioner (harnessing the system's capacity to deliver). Councils alone have the potential to bring together education, children's and family services, public health, transport, procurement and a range of other services who have needed to be involved in the pandemic response.</p> <p><b>This is not to say that all councils have been in a position to fulfil this role</b> – some have been better placed and have had capacity in parts of the local system they have been able to deploy more quickly. Where this role has been performed effectively, however, school leaders, children's services managers and partners have contrasted the capacity for two-way dialogue, informed planning, and shaping shared solutions at local level to the approach taken by central government. <i>'The [Council's] leadership during this period has been supportive, compassionate, and efficient.'</i> (Headteacher)</p>
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# Questions to discuss

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**1. Overall, do you recognise the picture we have presented?** Does this reflect the experience of your local area in responding to the pandemic period?

**2. In your local areas, specifically in relation to education and children's services, what are the key actions that have been taken that have been most effective?** What have been the key successes within your local areas' responses during this period?

**3. What, specifically, have been the implications for your role as elected members?** How has the way you carry out your role changed during this period?

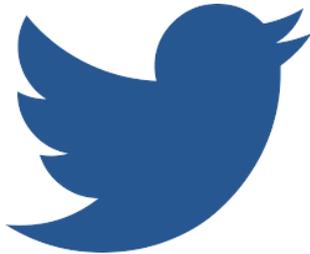
**4. What is needed to create strong, resilient local education and children's services systems in the future, and to enable councils to play the role of champion of vulnerable families, convener of partnerships, and commissioner of support?**

Many thanks for your time and contributions to this discussion.

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