# Safeguarding oversight of vulnerable children during Covid-19

As you are hopefully aware, a group has been set up to oversee the safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable children during this COVID-19 period. The group comprises the Head of Service and managers from Education, Learning & Skills (ELS), the Named Nurse for Children in Care, representatives from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the Head of Service and Service Managers from Integrated Children’s Services (ICS). The cohort of children in scope of the group’s remit is:

* Looked after children
* Children supported on a child protection plan
* Children supported under a child in need plan
* Highly vulnerable children identified by Preventative Services
* Vulnerable children identified by schools

The purpose of the group is to ensure there is a coordinated multi-agency approach to safeguarding during this period, particularly for children who are not attending school or their early years setting. It is essential that these vulnerable children continue to be seen by professionals on a regular basis (recognising that some of that contact may be virtually).

Please note that there is a separate group overseeing the safeguarding of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) during this period.

A high-level process diagram outlining these additional safeguarding steps during this period is embedded below.



# What has been done by Schools/Early Years Settings and our ELS colleagues so far?

A master list of vulnerable children has been created and all schools/early years settings have been asked to provide information about each of the listed children. This includes details about an initial risk assessment undertaken when schools/early years settings were first closed to the majority of pupils. Schools have also indicated whether or not the vulnerable child is attending school/early years setting.

For those children not attending school/early years setting, staff from the school/early years setting within the are creatively developing ways of working with the families on a regular basis, both in terms of providing education but also more general support for these vulnerable children that they may normally receive whilst in school/early years setting.

Our ELS colleagues have developed revised school safeguarding procedures and processes covering this period. This includes for example, a regular monitoring meeting with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) at each school/early years setting to review the most up to date position for each vulnerable child.

# What will Schools/Early Years Settings and our ELS colleagues do next?

Our ELS colleagues have applied the results of the work you recently did to identify those children who we regard as being of highest risk during this period to the master dataset. They will be calling the DSL of the schools/early years setting these vulnerable children attend on a regular basis to review the attendance position for each of these children from the setting’s perspective.

The ELS discussions with schools/early years settings will also start to investigate how vulnerable children who are not currently attending school/early years setting can be re-engaged with the setting environment where they have an allocated place. Your role as the allocated ICS worker, in partnership with the school/early years setting, is key in setting the expectation with children and their parents that the child should be attending school/early years setting, encouraging and persuading parent/carers to return their child to school/early years setting on a regular basis (where the school/early years setting and you agree it is safest for that child).

Schools/early years settings will continue their work to maintain good contact and relationships with children and families. You will be key to ensuring this contact is built into a coordinated plan for contact with the child and family, alongside contact from yourself and other professionals (such as the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), CP Chair or health practitioner) within the safety network.

# What do ICS need to do next?

We know that you have been working extremely hard over the last couple of weeks to risk assess the children you are responsible for in light of this current crisis and ensuring the safety of the children remains your priority. Thus much of what is outlined below is already in hand. The key now is to ensure this is happening on a consistent basis for all our vulnerable children.

1. All vulnerable children (i.e. looked after children or those supported on a child protection or child in need plan) should have a place at a school/early years setting in South Glos.

**For school age children -** If any of your allocated vulnerable children is not in school please talk to the appropriate teacher or safeguarding lead at the school to try and agree a plan for the child to start attending again or agree the current rationale for child not attending e.g. someone in the household is being shielded. The intention is for the ICS worker, the CP chair/IRO and school to work together to encourage parents/carers and/or foster carers to send the child to school again.

**For early years children** – If any of your allocated vulnerable children is not in their early years setting *and that setting is open*, please talk to the appropriate safeguarding lead at the early years setting to try and agree a plan for the child to start attending again or agree the current rationale for child not attending e.g. someone in the household is being shielded. *If the child’s usual setting is not open*, please contact the helpline set up for parents/carers by the Early Years Team on 07860 179789. Staff manning this phone line will also be able to support social workers find a suitable alternative place for a young child.

The intention is for the ICS worker, the CP chair/IRO, early years setting and early years team to work together to encourage parents/carers and/or foster carers to send the child to a setting again.

**For all children** - Please ensure you record the outcome of these discussions on the child’s Mosaic file by way of a case note.

1. Where parents refuse to send their child/ren or the child/ren refuse to attend please agree with the school/early years setting and other professionals a coordinated plan for contact with the child/family; this should include frequency, method of contact and agreement on how information will be shared. This plan should aim to provide a multi- agency shared approach to safeguarding the child/ren whilst they are not in school/early years setting and thus not being seen on a daily basis. It is key that if it is assessed that risks to the child have increased due to non- attendance that this plan reflects this to ensure close joined up working with schools/early years settings to work towards mitigating risk as far as possible. Please ensure that you record this contact plan outlining how all professionals, including yourself, the school/early years setting, health practitioners and/or the IRO/CP Chair, are working together to support the child/family on Mosaic.
2. Multi-agency reviews of CP and CIN plans and associated recording should continue. The overall plan can be reviewed alongside any additional contact/visiting plans put in place due to Covid-19; again it is crucial that the nominated school/early years setting reps are invited to these.
3. Timely communication is key throughout this period. It is essential that you are in regular communication with relevant school/early years staff, particularly to inform them of any changes in circumstances for a child and family. Schools/early years settings have been asked to do the same for you; 2-way communication is critical.
4. The Covid-19 weekly management oversight meetings (held on Mondays) are an additional opportunity for a multi-agency review of any child about whom we are particularly concerned – if a solution cannot be found via usual channels. As per usual practice, please discuss children you are particularly concerned about with your team manager. You may then decide between you that it is worth escalating to your Service Manager for consideration at the following oversight meeting.

### Contact information

Jo Cross
Head of Integrated Children’s Services
01454 86 6356
Jo.cross@sglos.gov.uk