

Coronavirus COVID-19: Information for Providers of Placements for Children Looked After, Care Leavers, Children in Need and Homeless Young People

Version 3 – 15 April 2020

Frequently Asked Questions

Lancashire County Council is following national guidance from the government and Public Health England and will update these frequently asked questions as required.

These FAQs are correct as at 15 April 2020 and will be updated at least fortnightly or sooner if national guidance changes.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with:

- guidance published by the UK Government on the following webpage <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- guidance contained on the Lancashire County Council's website, including the below link, which includes Care Provider Information at the bottom of the following webpage: <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/your-health-and-wellbeing/coronavirus/>

PLACEMENT FINDING

1. Will placement finding processes change?

There are currently no plans for placement finding processes to change.

All our Access to Resources Team (ART) members are set up to work in an agile way and have all the necessary equipment to continue to operate placement finding processes as usual. Placement finding and COVID-19 related contract monitoring issues are being prioritised by the team.

We ask providers to notify ART (via artenquiries@lancashire.gov.uk), alongside a child's social worker, of any general and case specific issues relating to COVID-19 so we can ensure effective oversight and consistency of approach across the county.

VISITORS

2. *Should I close my service to all visitors?*

No, we do not advise you to close to all visitors unless you have been specifically advised to do so by Public Health England.

But you should restrict visiting to essential visitors only.

Lancashire County Council supports your pragmatic decision-making, consistent with government advice, on social distancing and infection prevention measures. We also support you to have discussions about whether visits from professionals are essential, can be done in another way, or can be delayed.

We are instructing social workers, wherever possible, to consider alternative methods to face to face visits, such as via telephone or Skype. However, any restriction on visitors must not unreasonably restrict access to professionals carrying out statutory or otherwise essential duties, for example social workers or police needing to visit to investigate child protection concerns.

Anyone with coronavirus Covid-19 symptoms (high temperature or a new continuous cough) should not enter the home.

Alternative arrangements, for example telephone calls or Skype, will need to be made for all contact with relatives, for an initial period of 3 weeks commencing from 25th March and will be subject to review from there on.

EDUCATION

3. *Should Lancashire Children Looked After (CLA) be going to school?*

The government has published guidance for schools, colleges and local authorities on maintaining educational provision and in relation to vulnerable children and young people:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

In line with the most recent scientific advice on how to further limit the spread of COVID-19, the advice is that if children can stay safely at home, they should, to limit the chance of the virus spreading. Schools have been asked to remain open for those children who absolutely need to attend, which includes children who are vulnerable. Vulnerable

children are classed as those who have a social worker or an education, health and care (EHC) plan in place.

It is important to underline that schools, colleges and other educational establishments remain safe places for children. But the fewer children making the journey to school, and the fewer children in educational settings, the lower the risk that the virus can spread and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society.

The guidance includes the following key principles:

1. If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.
2. If a child needs specialist support, is vulnerable or has a parent who is a critical worker, then educational provision will be available for them.
3. Residential special schools, boarding schools and special settings continue to care for children wherever possible.

The guidance states that there is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend school, as long as it is safe for them to do so. In circumstances where a care provider (e.g. foster carer) does not want to send a looked after child to school, reasons for this should be explored with the social worker to help determine what is in the best interests of the child and /or resolve any concerns or difficulties wherever possible. As a general rule, unless a social worker has concerns for the child in placement, then agreement can be given for the child to be home schooled.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH COVID-19

4. Will staff/ foster carers be expected to provide care to children and young people who are symptomatic?

Yes. Fostering households, residential children's homes and supported accommodation/ semi-independent settings are considered households for the purposes of the household self-isolation policy. Meaning, the setting should follow national guidance and self-isolate if any resident shows symptoms:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings>

Please ensure that you notify the social worker of any child or young person who is displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or is living in a household with other people who are displaying symptoms.

Providers will be expected to continue to care for children and young people who are self-isolating or diagnosed – unless hospital care is required due to serious illness or treatment that can only be provided in a hospital setting.

Providers will be expected to receive back into their care symptomatic children and young people who no longer need to be in hospital.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

5. Is the Local Authority able to support us to source PPE?

We understand that obtaining critical PPE supplies is one of the key issues many providers may be struggling with.

When considering the supplies that you need, it is important to consider the latest guidance on Covid-19 Infection and Prevention Control, which sets out the Covid-19 related PPE required in different health and social care settings. The guidance is published on the Government website here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control>

If care providers have immediate concerns over their supply of PPE, where there are suspected or actual cases of Covid-19 in your establishment, there is a dedicated line for you, the health and social care sector.

The National Supply Disruption line

Tel: 0800 915 9964 | Email: supplydisruptionservice@nhsbsa.nhs.uk

The County Council cannot guarantee that we will be able to source PPE equipment for care providers but is receiving and reviewing requests to see if we can help resolve issues within the wider supply chain and highlight areas of need. Where you are unable to source supplies through your own suppliers please direct your request to CareProviderPPE@lancashire.gov.uk, indicating product types and quantities where possible.

As you will be aware, PPE is in extremely short supply and we urge providers to ensure that you are using this equipment in line with government guidelines.

REFUSAL TO COMPLY

6. How do we support children and young people who refuse to comply with the self-isolation and stay at home guidelines?

We recognise how challenging it is for us all to adhere to the guidelines, so we understand that some vulnerable young people and families are finding it incredibly difficult. We recognise that you will already have many strategies and approaches in place to manage behaviour. Where it becomes clear that a young person is not responding to the strategies you are putting in place, we request that you contact the social worker/ personal adviser as soon as possible.

Police have been given powers to enforce stay at home guidance. In situations where all attempts by the provider and social worker/ personal adviser to persuade a young

person to comply with this guidance have failed, advice should be sought from your neighbourhood police officer (PCSO).

STAFF SHORTAGES

7. I am worried we won't be able to cope if staff become ill. How can this be mitigated?

You should keep under review your business continuity plan to ensure that you can provide services in as many circumstances as possible. Staff ratios should be maintained at a safe level to protect children and young people.

Providers should assess staffing levels on a daily basis and liaise with the Access to Resources Team (ART) via 01772 533390 or artenquiries@lancashire.gov.uk where there is a risk of staffing shortages.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUESTS

8. Will Lancashire County Council provide additional funding to cover increased operating costs e.g. agency staffing?

Requests for additional resources/ increased placement costs will continue to be considered on a case by case basis. Providers of block-commissioned supported accommodation services should refer to the email and excel template that was circulated on 7th April 2020.

Please include ART into any requests being made to social workers for additional resources/ funding so we can maintain effective oversight and ensure a consistent countywide approach.

If you are having cash flow issues of any kind from any cause that affect the viability of your business please speak to us sooner rather than later. It is in all our interests to keep our providers in business and optimal operation wherever practicable.

BLOCK CONTRACTED SERVICES

9. Block contracted supported housing services manage referrals and prioritise applications in line with the Joint Protocol. Should we be considering new referrals?

If you have a vacant flat, and the County Council are looking for accommodation for a homeless young person or family then we want to work with you to assess the suitability of that flat for the young person or family. We understand that providers have already changed their referral processes. This includes reducing face to face contact and including questions directly related to COVID-19 in order to be able to assess the risks. ART will work with you to consider the appropriateness of any referral taking into account the needs of the individual and issues relating to your individual service plus any government guidance in place at the time.

10. The block commissioning supported accommodation arrangement contains stipulations such as when staff must be on site, and the number of support hours deliverable. In light of emerging staff pressures, can we operate more flexibility / creatively to allow us to ensure that young people and our staff remain safe?

Lancashire County Council fully recognises that support providers, as with the Council itself, are very quickly having to adopt different ways of working to ensure that services can operate safely. We support providers to make professional judgements as to how their services can best be delivered. We do ask that ART is informed immediately of any operational decisions that will affect service delivery.

Please ensure ART is informed in advance of any significant changes to delivery or emerging difficulties or queries not covered within these FAQ's.

For out of hours emergency issues that cannot wait for the next day – Contact the LCC Emergency Duty Team on 0300 123 6722