

Guidance for Childrens Services Staff During the COVID 19 outbreak.

Version 5.0 15/01/2021

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We have updated this guidance following the [National lockdown: stay at home](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care) guidance, which came into force on 5th January 2021 and updated guidance for children's social care which came out on the 8th January 2021. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care>

The main changes to the guidance for children's social care were regarding:

- vulnerable children and young people attendance at educational settings
- alternative provision (AP) schools and providers
- Ofsted inspections

However it is important that you re-familiarise yourself with this guidance document as this aims to support you to continue to undertake your role to the best of your and the organisations ability.

It is essential that we follow government guidance:

[National lockdown: stay at home](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care)

and use the Councils FAQ's for answers to queries where we can

<https://staff.shropshire.gov.uk/how-do-i/your-health-and-wellbeing/coronavirus-faqs/>

Please do use these.

As a statutory service, we have to maintain a core business function, and we are the frontline response to keeping children safe. As families are under increasing social isolation situations, financial pressure, changes to schooling environments, there is a concern that children could be affected by this within families.

This guidance aims to give you a framework within which to continue to do your role.

- We need to take a common sense and pragmatic approach.
- For those of you with statutory roles we need to undertake them to the best of our ability.
- Relationship based social work is at the heart of what we do, families will be concerned, anxious, but also in need of support and guidance. Build on the relationships you have.

Your Where Abouts:

It is essential we know where staff are, whether you are working, self-isolating and working, where you can working flexibly, off sick etc. Managers are having to do daily returns to HR so we can support organisational resilience – **we must know where and how all staff are on a daily basis.**

Please work flexibly across your teams/service. If you are working at home due to self isolation and others are covering your visits, what can you do in return to alleviate pressures in the service – e.g. can you cover duty calls, update chronologies and agency checks?

Statutory Social Workers:

You remain responsible for your allocated children / families/ foster carers/ adopters whilst you are at work, whether that is from home as you are working from home or you are self isolating and working.

If you are concerned about the welfare of a child and you are not able to undertake a visit to them at home / school as you are self isolating you must ensure your manager or another manager if yours is not available, is aware of that child and they can arrange a visit by some one else.

Undertake visits where it is safe to do so (i.e. the family are not shielding nor have coronavirus symptoms), if you can, see children in gardens, play a ball game, chat to them at a distance etc – they need to remain at the centre of what we do and if we follow guidance about safe contact distance, hand washing etc the risk is manageable.

The following guidance has been produced by the government:

[households with possible coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection guidance](#)

[safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings](#)

[social distancing guidance](#) and [guidance on meeting people outside your household](#)

Parents may need more frequent contact by phone as they may experience stress, emotional well being issues etc. Support with relationship based conversations, strategies re coping, confidence in their ability to get through this etc.

Please ensure that you have completed the risk rag rating for children and that case summaries are up-to-date for all of your allocated children, in case you become ill, and continue to update these on a weekly basis as risk will change. Please record the risk rag rating in your case summaries for your colleagues.

Principles of Visiting

All **non-statutory** visits can be virtual and should be, including FGC's at this time. Visits between Statutory visits can be virtual.

There is NO blanket decision about statutory visits – each one will be made on a child by child basis.

For Statutory visits, Sec 47, Child Protection, Looked After Child, Child In Need – Assessment of risk of the child and the protective / risk factors will inform the decision about face to face / virtual visits. Each child will be RAG rated.

If the child is attending school this is a primary protective factor as the child will be being seen face to face by a partner agency that know them well and this should inform the risk assessment.

All visits will be risk assessed with the family before hand and PPE will be utilised (minimum in line with guidance, please use a level that you are comfortable with.)

Where possible see a child outside and the inside of the house virtually.

Red, Amber Green Rating:

It is not possible to give definitive guidance that is used across all children, but as a guide and starting point the following can be used to assist in making assessments and decisions, professional judgement and understanding of the risks in the family and to the child are key:

RED- significant risk of serious harm, injury or death .

For looked after children – placement with parents on ICO, Reg 24, or placement at risk of breakdown).

Where referrals are new into the service and risk is unknown / unassessed.

Child is not in school and no other agency is visiting and we are concerned by the child not attending school.

All initial sec 47 visits will see the child face to face.

AMBER- moderate risk of either emotional or physical harm or neglect. May include some face to face, at Team Managers discretion.

May require increased virtual contact to manage the concerns.

For looked after children- children looked after in 1st 3 months or placement has some vulnerabilities.

Child is not in school / seen by another professional, but we are not concerned by this and it is in the child's best interest.

GREEN- low risk of harm or neglect.

Parents working with the social worker, to a plan and progress is being made. Risk of harm is reducing.

For looked after children-looked after over 3 months & stable placement.

Please make sure RAG ratings are updated on the spread sheet and the case summary – clearly dated.

Risk assessments are updated and uploaded onto LCS.

Rationale for decisions are recorded. Clear rationale as to what would change the RAG rating / concerns increased.

Let schools know if we are not visiting and make it clear that if the child stops attending the social worker needs to be notified.

There are few yes / no answers to the situations you will all be dealing with – we need to make sensible, thought out, risk assessed decisions with a clear rationale based on the situation you are

dealing with. If in doubt discuss with your / an available manager. RECORD YOUR DECISION AND RATIONALE.

Visits CIN and CP:

We need to maintain face to face visits to children that are at risk – especially those subject to Child Protection Plan.

Where there is domestic abuse in a family, and the family are shielding/have coronavirus symptoms, please risk assess and discuss a face-to-face visit with your manager.

Where a child has been risk rag rated red, and the family are shielding/have coronavirus symptoms please risk assess and discuss a face-to-face visit with your manager.

Non-essential visits and direct work can be undertaken in different ways and through maintaining contact virtually.

Please risk assess visits to children who are in self-isolation or families who are shielding.

Using your knowledge and your RAG rating of the child about risk and safety, where families are likely to be able to develop strategies, provide good care, manage the challenges, talk to them about how to best support them and respond.

Where we are concerned about families coping, impact of stress and isolation, escalating risk factors we need to keep the child at the centre.

Where a face to face visit cannot take place as the family/household are shielding or have coronavirus, please explain why the visit is virtual to the child and their rights to advocacy.

Where visits cannot be face to face (i.e. the family are shielding or have coronavirus symptoms) make contact with families by phone, support, assure, speak to the child directly, and speak to all children in the family. If Face Time is available ask to use that, get children to show you round their bedroom etc – make it a game.

Check with families before visiting if they are shielding, have been in contact, or have symptoms etc. Complete the pre-visit checklist.

We have a stock of PPE for visiting and this includes masks, aprons and gloves. Please do utilise these.

Visits to Looked after Children and Care Leavers

Shropshire is maintaining the minimum visiting requirements to looked after children and young people and also contact with care leavers. The minimum visiting requirements are as stated in the Care Planning Regs-6 weekly/12 weekly (note there are different timescales for children placed at home with a parent or with a Reg 24 approved connected carer).

Visits must take place face to face, however if the household is shielding, these can take place virtually. Virtual visits must:

- Only take place if agreed by Sonya Miller
- There must be clear recording of why this is taking place virtually in the case notes.
- Notification should be sent to Siobhan Hughes, Principal Social Worker to collate.

- The child should be advised why the visit is virtual and of their rights to advocacy.

Visits should take place mainly outside where possible and when viewing bedrooms, this should be done quickly and in PPE.

Decision Making and Rationale:

This situation is unprecedented, clear decision making and rationale will be more important than ever. If a decision is being made outside of procedures then the recording of this is essential.

If statutory visits cannot be undertaken – record it and why, if parents will not allow access record it.

If you think that refusal to allow you to see a child is a safeguarding issue then discuss with your manager or another manager if yours is not available. We need to be child focused, alert to risk and vulnerability but also understanding and pragmatic.

Where you are concerned about a child – can you build them a safety plan / person with other family, friends, and neighbours. Record this.

Where risk and concern escalates and threshold applies Strategy Discussions must be convened, and Sec 47 Investigations undertaken. Children should be seen face to face and alone during s47 investigations, utilising social distancing and PPE.

Supervision:

With so many of you working remotely Supervision, formal and recorded and informal support will be essential

Planned supervision discussions should go ahead, use Teams Meetings to do on screen discussions, record supervision as normal. If they need to be cancelled reschedule straight away. Supervision needs to be recorded on the child's record as normal.

Confirm arrangements in writing with each other.

Supervision keeps us all safe in our practice, now more than ever as we are having to adapt to different ways of working. Any concerns about a family, discuss with your manager, or another manager if yours is not available.

Strategy Discussions

Where possible strategy discussions will go ahead as required. The use of technology will be used and conference calls, Teams etc

Sec 47 Visits

Where possible these need to go ahead and the child needs to be seen and preferably alone. If the family are in self-isolation voluntary complete a risk assessment – we may need to see the child in the garden etc

If the family are self isolating due to diagnosed Covid 19 then escalate to a Service Manager and we will risk assess and discuss with the Police etc

If in doubt discuss with a Manager.

Family Time.

Separate Guidance is being developed and issued about Family Time

Child Protection Conferences ICPC and RCPC

All Child Protection Case Conferences will take place to prevent risk to children. Professionals will be able to dial in to meetings and parents should be supported to attend. Where families are not able to access the technology to attend meetings virtually, please let us know and we will try and facilitate access. Please ensure that children are invited to attend child protection case conferences where appropriate, and if they are not able to attend, the reason is recorded on the case file and their wishes and feelings are recorded and presented to the conference.

LAC Reviews

A looked after child review can take place in a series of meetings, rather than 1 singular meeting. Therefore the LAC review process will begin on the date as planned and the IRO may use a variety of methods to communicate with professionals and families, including telephone and Microsoft teams meetings. Please ensure that all age appropriate children are invited to Looked after Children Reviews and that their wishes and feelings are completed with them prior to this meeting and presented to the IRO. Visits by IROs will still take place virtually, and it should be explained to children why these are taking place virtually as well as being reminded of their rights to advocacy.

Staff undertaking non-statutory / support visits.

Please discuss with social workers what can be stood down or can be moved to virtual.

We need to preserve our support workforce health and safety, but also make sure that we can support children who do need it – especially when they are well and not in self-isolation.

If in doubt discuss with your Team Manager

In some ways, COVID-19 has presented more opportunities to build relationships with children, young people and their families. Please keep in touch regularly with a child, by phone, message, send cards, send work sheets to complete / art activities etc – Get Creative!