

Impacts of Covid-19 on Children and Young People in the United Kingdom

Executive Summary of findings from analysis of Fourth Strategic Roundtable with Strategic Leaders 2020

C19 National Foresight Group

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This review is an independent commission by Shaun West and completed by the C19 National Foresight Group. In the spirit of continuous learning and reflection, this document is to be shared widely with Local Resilience Forums, partners and government departments.

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Executive Summary

Commissioned by Shaun West, Chair of C19 National Foresight Group. Prepared by Dr Rowena Hill on behalf of the C19 National Foresight Group.

Findings and Suggested Actions

One: The aggregating impacts from in and out of education establishments causes difficulty for CYP

Children and young people have experienced both positive and negative impacts of the pause and restart approach to schooling. Positives include SEND CYP seeking to be home schooled in future as anxiety has lessened during this time, whilst the negatives link to impacts on emotional health, mental health, lack of socialisation, disruption to education, anxiety around qualifications and inconsistent learning methods, lack of access to training programs, those already behind falling further behind, disruptive behaviour, and lack of ability to monitor safeguarding concerns. A full data picture must be gathered to understand the level of impact on each individual CYP and the scale of CYP affected. The response requires both national co-ordination and local nuance to meet CYPs educational needs, and the Education Endowment Fund's report into ranges of interventions could provide an example model for a targeted approach.

Two: Vulnerability of individual children, young people and families has increased through the impacts of Covid-19

Many children, young people and their families have faced difficulties during the Covid-19 pandemic, but these impacts have not been experienced equally. There are clear disparities for CYPF's across different regions, and who are in lower socio-economic groups, including insecure tenancy, increased poverty, reduced income, employment insecurity, lack of access to food, domestic abuse, and mental health concerns. Vulnerable and vulnerability needs to be clearly defined to ensure all services are working within the same bounds and the CYPF who need support are identified. Simply having vulnerabilities does not mean poor outcomes are inevitable; this identification needs to encourage services to consider what can be implemented and developed into positive, protective factors to prevent poor outcomes transpiring. Having an awareness of the potentially longer term but unknown impacts of Covid-19 will prepare services for future service demand, and utilising routinely collected data would potentially provide evidence of the need to increase funding for service provision.

Three: Vulnerability in service provision has increased and exacerbated through the impacts of Covid-19

Services that support children, young people and their families were struggling prior to the pandemic, and this has only been exacerbated by Covid-19. This is experienced as a lack of volunteers, a lack of resources and a lack of capacity and is due to funding cuts and reduced priority. Utilising routinely collected data would provide insight into the services lost, the issues they face, and CYPF's access to them, in order to improve provision. Additionally, this analysis should be undertaken using multi-agency scope to prevent issues being viewed in silo and to ensure resolutions are identified throughout the network of services.

Four: Children and Young Persons Voices Heard

Children and young people are not passive recipients of support, and throughout the pandemic they have demonstrated how motivated and enthused they are to make a difference to people and their communities. Opportunities that enable and facilitate young people to find solutions to be offered, and a change in people's perceptions to the belief that young people can make a positive difference to society is needed.

Five: Solutions should focus on local

Covid-19 affects different areas, different services, and different families in different ways. For a comprehensive and suitable response, resolutions need to respond to the local area and local people's needs. Utilising already collected data can help identify families in need, where there are a lack of services/funding, and access options.

Solutions Summary

This report has highlighted a number of solutions to common challenges laid out by delegates during the strategic roundtable. These are set out below.

Finding One

Suggested solution: A simplified and aligned policy framework should be created, to allow for effective and efficient partnerships that can identify need and work out solutions collaboratively moving forward.

Suggested solution: As discussed initially within finding two, then again in finding three, delegates believed that utilising routinely collected data would benefit CYPF the most. Specifically, for this theme, delegates felt that using the data to understand need would mean that services could be implemented before they were needed and so problems could be prevented rather than managed once they had arisen and potentially reached crisis point. The outcome then is an increase in, and emphasis on, the positive, protective factors children have in their lives.

Finding Two

Suggested Solution: The need to define vulnerable/vulnerability and at risk. Delegates explained that each service uses different approaches and their focus is on different areas, meaning the definition of vulnerable can differ, with consequences for shared understandings across multi-agency working. Delegates recognised that what each person or service understands as vulnerable and vulnerability is varied so the starting point must be to have a consensual framework to work from. This is needed to avoid confusion and provide clarity. Delegates were clear that the focus should not be on Covid-19 vulnerabilities alone, but that wider vulnerabilities, such as domestic abuse, those included within the ACEs framework, children in care and children with SEND, should also be considered/included.

Suggested Solution: Challenge inevitability of poor outcomes. Whilst there was agreement that all vulnerabilities should be included in the new definition, there was extensive discussion about the ACEs framework; that there is no standardised approach across the country and that it suggests an inevitability of poor outcomes, experiences and harm. Delegates did not agree with this inevitability, challenging the use of ACEs and instead introducing PACEs – protective adverse childhood experiences. It was recognised that schools, churches, friendship groups and teachers can be protective factors for children, and that sometimes adversity can be a spur for success. Delegates did not want vulnerabilities to be identified through a tick box exercise, the child to be labelled and then nothing to happen; they wanted to take proactive steps to identify where vulnerabilities may occur, using data that is known and has already been collected to implement primary interventions that address these vulnerabilities, in order to protect children and resolve problems before they actively arose. The context of adversity must be understood to overcome it. It was also raised that in order to support children, their care givers must be supported, as they are the ones who care for the children and improve their resilience. This is likely to be with poverty and deprivation, with employment and with housing.

Suggested Solution: Use, synthesise and share integrated routinely collected data. Many delegates shared that a wealth of data is already collected across numerous sectors about CYPF lives and delegates call for this to be methodically reviewed and analysed in order to be of benefit to policy and practice. This will be raised at different points throughout the report, but for this section should cover CYPF access to services, service provision and integration. Once CYPF's experiences are understood through the different lenses of each of the services, the holistic view will mean recommendations can be made and implemented. It is likely that provision will need increasing once areas of need are identified.

Once such information is gathered and need is identified, implementing the changes through a multi-agency and partnership working approach will ensure the multi-faceted impacts are addressed.

Suggested Solution: The need was identified to develop an awareness of potential long-term impacts. Delegates raised that they believe some latent impacts of Covid-19 have not yet transpired and, rather than wait for this issue to arise to then resolve it, active steps should be taken to model numbers in order to consider solutions. In this sense, services could implement protective factors and safety nets prior to reaching potential crisis and this enables the opportunity to use intelligence to inform planning and prioritising need based on likely impact and outcomes.

Finding Three

Suggested solutions: The solution discussed within the second theme, utilising routinely collected data, could provide further insight into the available services, CYPF's access to services and the improvements needed to ensure CYPF needs are met. This would provide evidence and rationale for the need for funding and policy development in these areas.

Suggested solutions: Many delegates raised that services often work in silo and are informed by one approach or view, but that there is benefit in using different lenses to see the same issue. A multi-agency scope of the impacts of Covid-19 on CYPF and services would provide further evidence of the need for funding and resource provision, and also provide a comprehensive space to plan a network approach to meet the CYPF's needs.

Finding Four

Suggested solution: To facilitate and enable young people to inform solutions as they are the experts and curators of their own lives. Delegates recognised that Covid-19 is something that is happening to all CYP, and one way for CYP to have and retain agency over this is to help others. By finding solutions to problems the CYP, their families and their communities face, the CYP can see and feel that they are making a difference and having an impact at a time when they may otherwise feel passive. The challenge for agencies/services is to facilitate this direct action safely, mainly occurring through structured youth groups. Although such volunteering primarily relates to older CYP, it was also mentioned that younger children can be given volunteering opportunities such as writing postcards to residents of care homes. Delegates discussed the importance of ensuring young people feel that they are part of the solution.

Suggested solution: Shift people's perceptions that young people can actively and positively contribute to society. Delegates were clear that the CYP they have worked with are keen to be involved and make a difference, they are not passive and they do not lack motivation. What is needed is to show CYP's enthusiasm and ability to help by demonstrating what they can and have done already. Delegates explained this was a plethora of things, including engagement with at risk groups through safe contact (such as young children sending letters to care homes) and active contributions (such as teenagers undertaking community work) and peer support and inspiration for each other (the previously mentioned peer support videos).

Finding Five

Suggested solution: A simplified and aligned policy framework should be created, to allow for effective and efficient partnerships that can identify need and work out solutions collaboratively moving forward.

Suggested solution: As discussed initially within finding two, then again in finding three, delegates believed that utilising routinely collected data would benefit CYPF the most. Specifically, for this theme, delegates felt that using the data to understand need would mean that services could be implemented before they were needed and so problems could be prevented rather than managed once they had arisen and potentially reached crisis point. The outcome then is an increase in, and emphasis on, the positive, protective factors children have in their lives.

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