

12th March 2020

Dear Jonathan and Jeremy

I am aware that your department will have been undertaking detailed planning for the possibility of a UK wide outbreak of COVID-19 and I note that guidance has already been issued to local authorities on this matter. I have no wish to distract from these concerted efforts. I do, however, have some specific issues on which I would like some clarification.

I note the scientific evidence that children, without underlying health concerns, are less vulnerable to infection from this virus than the older population. Nonetheless as Children's Commissioner with a statutory remit to act on behalf of children in care, I am requesting a specific update on what plans have been made to support Local Authorities in delivering services to children, including children in care.

I am particularly interested in whether any of the £5billion funding announced at the Budget for supporting public services in their response to COVID-19 is being allocated to children's social care, to address the potential significant staff shortages in residential children's settings and among social workers.

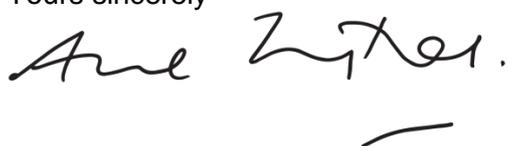
I am aware that you have published guidance on actions to be taken by social workers and residential care settings, but can you confirm whether additional guidance will be issued to explain how in practice children's homes – which have high 24-hour staffing needs – and other residential settings are expected to manage if children become unwell or if self-isolation of children and carers is required.

I would also like to know how children in care in semi-independent accommodation will be kept informed of the risks of infection and supported if they are infected with the virus or need to self-isolate. Finally, could you tell me what guidance the department is issuing to social workers on how they should complete statutory visits to children during the pandemic, including visits to children who are accommodated out of their local area.

It would be helpful to know what processes are in place nationally to monitor, and if needs be, intervene to ensure children in care have the protection and support they need.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely



Anne Longfield OBE
Children's Commissioner for England

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