GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN AND CULTURE STAFF IN RELATION TO UNDERTAKING CORE ACTIVITIES WHILST COVID 19 EMERGENCY REGULATIONS APPLY;

On 16th March 2020, the government updated its coronavirus pandemic advice. The guidance contains new and/or enhanced advice on social distancing and staying at home. This has implications for social work practice, which is detailed below.

General advice

Please ensure that you continue to be up to date with [government advice](https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response), which is changing frequently. The LBTH intranet is also updated with advice for staff. You are strongly advised to follow this guidance with respect to your own health.

The following advice on social work practice dated from 17th March and may be subject to change.

All staff will need to remain aware that the response to the emerging Covid 19 pandemic will inevitably remain subject to change and review. Where advice and guidance needs to change we will keep staff updated. The following advice has been written with a view of finding a sustainable and enduring way of working that continues to promote the needs of vulnerable young people who may need to be safeguarded, whilst also seeking to balance this against the needs to keep staff safe and healthy so that services can continue to run. As we are now effectively operating within an emergency situation our strategies and response to the emerging pressures will also be considered alongside the Council’s Emergency Business Continuity plan.

**Visits**

Where feasible, visits these should continue for all CP, CIN and CLA cases, unless the household is following [“Stay at Home guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection”](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection). If the household is following this advice, then you should consider undertaking visits by telephone or FaceTime.

Prior to a home visit, you should telephone the family to confirm arrival time and check whether the household is (or needs to be) following the “Stay at Home” guidance. You should also check whether there are any vulnerable people living in the household, so that arrangements can be made for the visit to take place in a separate room from those people to avoid direct contact.

Where cases are jointly open to two services (e.g. YOS and CSC) the visit should be undertaken by just one person. Prior to the visit, the issue areas that need to be discussed for the perspective of both services should be identified, agreed and planned for by both workers.

You should discuss the timeframe over which the household plans to undertake self-isolation. Where there are known safeguarding concerns, you should check that the timeframes align with national guidance and are not unduly prolonged.

Where visits are substituted with telephone or FaceTime contact, this will need to be clearly recorded, along with the reason why the family have given for not allowing us into the home.

**Duty Service**

It will be vital that we maintain a workable duty service to ensure that new concerns which are identified can be prioritised and responded to in a way that continues to safeguard young people. I will regularly review staffing numbers in MASH/A&I to ensure that we can respond to emergencies.

We may also need to explore creating two non-overlapping teams to minimise the spread of any infection.  We will also begin to explore how we might be able to utilise Youth Service staff and some staff parks and recreation to undertake some non-statutory tasks that might involve moving young people to essential appointments/meetings.

**Children With Disabilities – home visits**

This group of young people are likely to be more susceptible to infection and therefore we will have to take additional care when making a judgement about undertaking home visits. As above we may choose to do visits via phone or face time. However we must also be cognisant of those young people who have a level of disability but are also on a CP plan. We will need to take careful judgements to ensure that their safety is not compromised.

* **External facing Meetings;** Where it is feasible to do so meetings should be held via tele-conference. There may still be some CP conferences where we will need to insist that face to face meetings are preferable, particularly where we are needing to take parents through difficult information and decisions. These decisions will need to be taken in conjunction with Service managers. However it is the expectation that most CP conferences will be conducted by using Tele-conference facilities.
* **Internal Meetings;** Such as Legal panel, IPOP, CIN Summit, Team Meetings should continue as normal, on the basis that if staff are in work usual practice is expected. If staff choose to use some degree of “social distancing” for these meeting that should be encouraged and accommodated.
* **Foster-Carers;** Visits to foster-carers should follow the same guidance as outlined above in the “Visits” section. In situations where carers or young people in placement contract the virus they should follow the government guidance and self-isolate within the household by staying in a separate room (bedroom) and use the kitchen and toilet facilities at different times to the rest of the household and clean carefully after using these facilities.
* **Visits to Residential Establishments;** A small but significant number of our young people are accommodated in residential establishments (including young offenders institutes). The establishment should be contacted prior to any visit to ascertain the appropriateness of the visit and check the position in relation to whether or not establishment has any reported cases of Covid 19.  If a physical visit is required, then arrangements should be made to minimise contact with any staff or other young people,(ie; can a separate room be set aside for the visit).  If a telephone call/face time conversation is appropriate then this should also be considered.

**Home-Working;** For staff with underlying health conditions, arrangements should be made to allow these staff to work from home and to undertake the statutory monitoring visits via telephone or face-time from their homes.

* Each service area will need to look maintaining an emergency/response staff presence in the office in order to cover emergencies that may require more than 1 person to attend or respond to a particular event. Service areas may wish to look at covering this on a rota basis. As stated above, the Duty function may require a slightly different arrangement and we will explore a joint duty/response arrangement with the YOS.  All working from home arrangements will need to be kept constantly under review and may be subject to alteration depending on how the current emergency situation develops.
* **Virtual School:**
* Will remaining advocating and supporting the education of LAC. All staff are Qualified Teachers (QTS) that can support and advice on home education by carers.
* **Pressures:**

The Virtual School staff still have work to complete this term on data regarding PEP meeting and LAC attainment.  We have asked VS teacher to complete outstanding PEPs by phone were appropriate. We have also been asked to support the following groups as priority.

* Yr11 – GCSE
* Students from Bowden House LAC
* **Support with education we can offer:**

Most pupils being sent home by schools will be provided with “work packs” and tasks. Some children (with learning needs or other barriers) may find it difficult to access or interpret this learning and Carers may need advice or support on how to help their LAC.

Also at present we have little information on how this prolonged absence will impact on standardised testing this year – GCSE, A Level and SAT’s.

* As teachers we know that learning is a habit and pupils of all ages need to be kept mentally active with a focus on practising core skills of literacy and numeracy.   We are concerned that suspending all learning will lead to regression, falling behind peers and a lack of ability to pick up.
* A good parent will be challenging their child to continue with their learning and keeping on top of academic work to boost outcomes that underpin their long-term future prospects.
* The Virtual School is prepared to link with carers and speak to young people using social media if necessary. At present we do not have the new IT roll out so “Whatsapp” and email would be our favoured method\*. This is a pragmatic solution that raises safeguarding issues that need to mitigated.
* In this unprecedented situation we will be communicating directly with pupils, so would want to know a Carer is viewing conversations and aware of our interactions.  All interactions will be recorded on a daily log by my staff and cannot be adhoc, casual phone calls.
* Safeguarding concerns should be reported in the usual manner.
* Email requests for support should be emailed to the Deputy of the Virtual School,  Helen Murphy and cc: to Shahirul Bashar and Kay Gormley. Helen will allocate work according to capacity. Shah and Kay will handle admin and recording.
* It is essential that carers understand that we are not offering 1 to 1 tuition, we do not have that as capacity, we are enabling **them** to support their child.
* If a child has unspent PPP in their personal  budget our allocated staff will seek to access tuition either physical or online.  Where LAC young people are currently receiving 1:1 tuition with a tutor at home, we have let Carers know that they can decide if they want this to continue or not.
* *\*We are willing to use other methods suggested or accessed via their school. I will assess the safeguarding issues presented.*
* **The virtual school does not have the capacity to be a call centre therefore email should be used to request call backs and virtual appointments. This will prevent overload, equitable and effective service.**
* **Contact for carers:**
* [VS.DPS@towerhamlets](mailto:VS.DPS@towerhamlets) .gov.uk – this email will be checked by Kay Gormley, Shahirul Bashar and Fadumo Said daily.
* **Social workers:**
* The allocated Virtual School Teacher – if this is unknown request this via the email above.
* **Wider strategic decisions – managers and above**
* Helen Murphy, David Cregan