



### **Summary: impact on vulnerable children**

- The Covid-19 pandemic has transformed our society - as always, the most vulnerable are most at risk.
- Many children and families Barnardo's support:
  - Live in poverty and rely on jobs in the gig economy
  - Are in the care system or have a history of trauma & abuse
  - Have mental health needs.
- We welcome the Government's decision to keep schools open to children of key workers and vulnerable children, as well as the promise of meal vouchers for children eligible for free school meals.

### **However - we are concerned that:**

- Many children with 'hidden' vulnerabilities risk falling through the net - including young carers & children living with domestic abuse.
- Periods of isolation may also heighten the effects of neglect abuse, domestic abuse and online harms.

### **To support vulnerable children at this uniquely challenging time:**

- What will the Government do to ensure vulnerable children receive the support they need?
- Will the Department for Education ensure local schools and local authorities are collaborating to ensure vulnerable children and those of key workers can access an educational setting?
- How will the Government ensure that the relaxation of local authorities' duties will not disadvantage young people leaving the care system, disabled young people and young carers?
- What additional resource will be available locally to cope with a potential increase in the number of children requiring support from social services?
- Will children accessing mental health support at school be able to access it elsewhere?
- Will the Government Digital Service<sup>1</sup> urgently provide guidance and support on using digital technology to support children and young people remotely? Will the Government work with the tech industry, such as internet and phone providers, to provide families with the tools they need to access school work and support?
- How will the Government work with Barnardo's and other charities to ensure vulnerable children are identified and receive the support they need?

Barnardo's stands ready to work flexibly with local and national government to meet children's changing needs at this time. We will continue to provide specialist support in any way we can, in person, on the phone, online, and in any other way.

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<sup>1</sup> Government Digital Service. Available [online](#).

## **Coronavirus Bill**

The Coronavirus Bill will relax duties on local authorities to provide essential services and allow them to prioritise social care for adults most in need over other duties. Whilst we appreciate the immediate need to protect those most at risk from the virus, vulnerable children and young people must not lose out on vital support. **This would create a false economy, with more young people developing more significant needs.**

We are concerned that:

- Assessments for vulnerable young people transitioning into adult social care could be delayed, including young people leaving care and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- Assessments and support for adults with less acute needs may be reduced, which could leave young carers (children caring for adults) shouldering more responsibility than they can manage.

As a result:

- Care leavers could miss out on safe accommodation or training and employment opportunities.
- Young carers may go unidentified or unsupported - with significant impact on their mental health and wellbeing.
- Adults with significant needs may be unable to care for their children without the right support - resulting in children needing local authority support or even coming into the care system.

## **Impact on child protection**

The number of children entering the care system in England is already at a 10 year high with 78,150 children in the care system as of March 2019.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, funding has consistently reduced, and as a result 9 in 10 local authorities overspend to meet rising demand.<sup>3</sup>

The Covid-19 outbreak will put a greater strain on families to keep children safe as well on the ability of children's services to respond.

### **About Barnardo's**

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity. Today we support around 300,000 children, young people, parents and carers through more than 1,000 services.

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education, 2019. Children looked after in England. Available [online](#).

<sup>3</sup> Guardian, 2019. Rise in children taken into care pushes 88% of councils over budget. Available [online](#).