RESPOND, REIMAGINE, RECOVER:
A FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

DRAFT

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 is the greatest global health, social and economic crisis of our lifetime. It is also a child rights crisis.

Beyond the direct health consequences of the virus itself, the pandemic has attacked the way children access education and services, exacerbated child poverty, food insecurity and deep-rooted inequalities, and exposed and increased the risks facing already vulnerable groups in their homes and communities.

Cities and communities have been at the forefront of the covid-19 response – providing essential services to the most vulnerable, ensuring the flow of information to residents, even providing emergency funding to local groups.

This local response will be made more effective, resilient, and innovative if guided by children's rights.

This document has been drafted by the Unicef UK Child Friendly Cities & Communities (CFC) programme and provides a framework for cities and communities to incorporate children's rights into their response and recovery planning. While it has been developed for the local authorities and their partners taking part in the CFC programme, we hope it also proves helpful to other local authorities when developing their own covid-19 responses for children and young people.

Almost a year into the pandemic, many unknowns remain, but local authorities have been quick to learn and adapt. This framework is based on two situation analyses conducted six months apart, as well as our observations of the response in our partner local authorities. It sets out recommendations around five key areas – *access to information, housing, mental health, policing,* and *children at risk* – and links to our latest situation analysis, as well a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) tool, which can be used to directly understand the impact of decisions on children's rights.

This framework is not intended to replace our existing programme model, nor is it exhaustive. 2020 has been shaped by a global pandemic, racial injustice and climate disaster. Emerging from this turbulent year provides an opportunity to reimagine cities and communities from the perspective of children and young people and is likely to require innovative thinking around climate change and environmental justice including long term solutions for housing; bringing children and young people to the centre of urban planning and wider decision-making; rethinking the way frontline services are delivered incorporating lessons from lockdown; and rooting discrimination out of cities and communities to ensure all children and young people have the same opportunities to flourish and be safe.

A "reimagining" may not head the priority lists of local authorities struggling to stay afloat after years of cuts, only to be hit by the devastating impact of covid-19. Yet children and young people will be living with the impacts of this pandemic for years to come and should not be left out of the decisions that determine their future.

The [child rights-based approach](#) taken in Unicef Child Friendly cities and communities requires a change of mindset, not big budgets, and places children and young people at the heart of post-pandemic planning.

SUMMARY

1. *(Access to information)* Empowering communities to influence and participate in the pandemic response by ensuring information around covid-19 is produced in a timely, accessible, child-friendly format, and supporting children and young people to access digital devices and online resources.

2. *(Housing)* Prioritising the health and wellbeing of children inside the home and in the wider built environment by putting children at the heart of housing and environmental policy.

3. *(Mental health)* Meeting the mental health needs of the child and youth population by ensuring appropriate mental health and well-being services are available, underpinned by effective multi-agency working and innovative practice.

4. *(Policing)* Keeping children and young people safe by making this a priority for the police and other frontline services.

5. *(Children at risk)* Protecting children at risk by ensuring real time data collection and analysis of existing and emerging vulnerabilities for children and young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Local authorities and their partners can support children's right to reliable information from a variety of sources, including the local media. This includes understanding how children and young people access information and protecting them from harmful content and misinformation. To support children and young people's engagement, it is necessary to empower communities to influence and participate in the pandemic response, involving respected figures from the community such as faith leaders, or youth and outreach workers. This will provide knowledge on what is working well in terms of communications mechanisms and areas for improvement. Steps should be taken to promote children's meaningful participation such as providing digital devices and training to professionals, families, children and young people.

Recommendations:

1. Empower communities to influence and participate in how information is shared, so that it can be done in a way that speaks to the community it seeks to inform; no one size fits all.

2. Ensure that accurate and relevant information regarding covid-19 and the reimagining of services is produced in a timely, accessible, child-friendly format.

3. Utilise data and knowledge of the local community to build awareness and understanding of the lived experience of children and young people who do not have access to the internet, and bridge this digital divide by providing computers or points of digital access.

4. Continually assess how the rapid move to online and remote service delivery of vital services is affecting access for different groups of children and young people and ensure they have the digital devices and privacy they need to be supported in this way.

5. In instances where children are unable or unwilling to engage with key services online, consider how services can creatively engage with the child, such as through covid-safe detached youth work.

6. Ensure parents, carers, professionals, children and young people have the opportunity to access free learning and development to support their digital literacy.

HOUSING

Children have the right to an adequate standard of living. This means a healthy home with space for play and study. While most children in the UK have been able to return to school, the lengthy period of lockdown over summer and the possibility of further lockdown restrictions make it more important than ever that children are growing up in suitable, stable environments that allow them to thrive and flourish. Local authorities and their partners should strive to understand where and how children and young people live and prioritise their health and wellbeing inside the home and in the wider built environment.

Recommendations:

1. Ensure parks, play areas and green spaces remain open to children and young people and prioritise their use of these spaces during lockdown.

2. Tackle damp, noise pollution and overcrowding issues as an urgent priority.

3. Ensure children and young people are adequately accommodated throughout the pandemic and beyond. No children and young people should be experiencing homelessness.

4. Plan ahead to ensure that when eviction protections are lifted, families are supported to move into new accommodation without experiencing a gap.

5. Review local housing policy using a Child Rights Impact Assessment and ensure local housing teams, services and associations know how to use a child rights-based approach when planning and making local housing decisions.

MENTAL HEALTH

Children cannot enjoy their right to life, survival and development or access to good quality healthcare without access to mental health services. Local authorities and their partners can seek to deepen understanding of the child and youth population in need of mental health support. There should be effective multi-agency working across the community, characterised by a shared language and understanding of the presenting need and response. Strong cross coordination, with clear roles and responsibilities, should afford communities a clear understanding of the mental health services available for children and young people. This should include universal, targeted and specialist services.

Recommendations:

1. Ensure effective partnership working at the strategic level, so that the local offer for children and young people is cohesive and there is clear leadership, accountable for children's access to mental health services.

2. Understand the presenting need across the child and youth population and ensure that there are appropriate and responsive mental health services to meet the needs of children and young people.

3. Recognise the uniqueness of current circumstances and how this may have impacted children who, prior to the pandemic, were not known to targeted and specialist services.

4. Creatively consider how children can access mental health services and meaningfully engage. This might include exploring innovative solutions and promoting covid-safe outreach and engagement for children and young people who are finding services hard to reach online.

POLICING

Police and other emergency services have a vital role to play in keeping children and young people safe during the covid-19 pandemic and should carry out this role with the best interests of the child as their primary consideration. Policing agencies can help children and young people to keep themselves and others safe by supporting them to understand the public health response and how to access help. Local outreach and community engagement can help the police understand the risks and challenges children and young people face during this period and develop an appropriate, child-centred response.

Recommendations:

1. Ensure young people understand the public health response and restrictions by sharing clear, child and young person-friendly information with them.

2. Ensure officers understand the challenges and vulnerabilities that may make it difficult for some young people to comply with restrictions and focus on signposting to available help and support. Use diversion schemes where children are found to be in conflict with the law.

3. Work with key local agencies such as social workers, youth teams and the voluntary sector to understand the needs of children and young people who may be at risk and develop a comprehensive strategy for ensuring these children and young people are protected and supported.

4. Avoid discriminatory enforcement of public health restrictions. As part of wider community relations efforts, build trusting relationships between police and children and young people through covid-safe outreach and engagement.

5. Ensure officers know and understand how to use a child rights-based approach when interacting with children and young people.

CHILDREN AT RISK

Children's rights apply to every child without discrimination. In order for crisis response to be in the best interests of every child, local authorities and their partners can assess the nature of vulnerabilities of children and young people in the community, investigate the potential that children and young people are experiencing new vulnerabilities and, in particular, be aware of those likely to be at risk of immediate harm. Attention should be paid to information and data about the child and youth population, including an acknowledgement of gaps and blind spots as the picture emerges. Supporting children's engagement with services requires services to robustly reflect on how they can continue to ensure accessibility and a child-friendly approach.

Recommendations:

1. Be aware of groups of children routinely discriminated against and ensure they are supported to access services.

2. During the crisis response period conduct real-time evaluations of services provided for vulnerable children, young people and their families, and support services to adapt proactively and reactively in response to these.

3. Ensure services are responsive to the possibility that many children and young people may be newly vulnerable or experiencing new vulnerabilities because of the crisis. Be prepared to challenge assumptions and ensure that data is collected and analysed, and gaps in data are identified, so that there is understanding of strengths and vulnerabilities across the child and youth population.

4. Conduct a full risk profiling of your jurisdiction. Consider what constitutes risk and vulnerability to children and young people. Using available data, construct a risk profile for the community and in the process identify (a) gaps in necessary data for fully understanding risk; (b) areas of greatest risk; and (c) opportunities to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance both support services and community coping capacity.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

In April 2020, as the UK was locked-down for the first time in the coronavirus pandemic, Unicef UK produced a rapid review of the impact this might have for children in the UK. The review – available here – provided an early overview of what may happen to inform policy and programmatic response.

Now, nearly nine months later, a lot more is known about the pandemic, the measures taken by government and the impact on children. This brief report provides an update on some key issues for children and young people in this period. It is intended to support local authorities in thinking about their ongoing work to help children during the pandemic and in the period of recovery that will follow it.

Download here

CHILD RIGHTS IMPACT ASSESSMENT: TOOL AND GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The CFC team has developed a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) tool for local authorities with accompanying guidance. The CRIA can be used to mainstream children's rights principles and the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into strategic planning and commissioning, policy development, problem-solving, programme prioritisation, budget-setting, and service design, delivery and evaluation.

Download here

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Practical actions in cities to strengthen preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond: An interim checklist for local authorities

- UNICEF Core Commitments For Children in Humanitarian Action (Pocket Version 2020)

- Unicef UK Child Friendly Cities and Communities; Staying Safe Online. A guide for practitioners

- UNICEF Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (2016)

CHILD FRIENDLY CITIES & COMMUNITIES IS A UNICEF UK PROGRAMME THAT WORKS WITH COUNCILS TO PUT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS INTO PRACTICE.

The programme aims to create cities and communities in the UK where all children – whether they are living in care, using a children's centre, or simply visiting their local library – have a meaningful say in, and truly benefit from, the local decisions, services and spaces that shape their lives.

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