CHILD FRIENDLY CITIES & COMMUNITIES

unicef
UNITED KINGDOM

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE NEW NORMAL
1. ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND SERVICES

THE CHANGE

When the UK first locked down in spring 2020, years of public service innovation took place in a matter of months. With a rapid shift to remote service delivery, online engagement and information sharing, the aspiration councils held for years to "go digital" became a reality out of necessity.

For many children and young people, virtual home visits, remote meetings, online assessments, and social interactions through a screen have become the norm – with time intensive trips to physical meeting spaces feeling suddenly quaint.
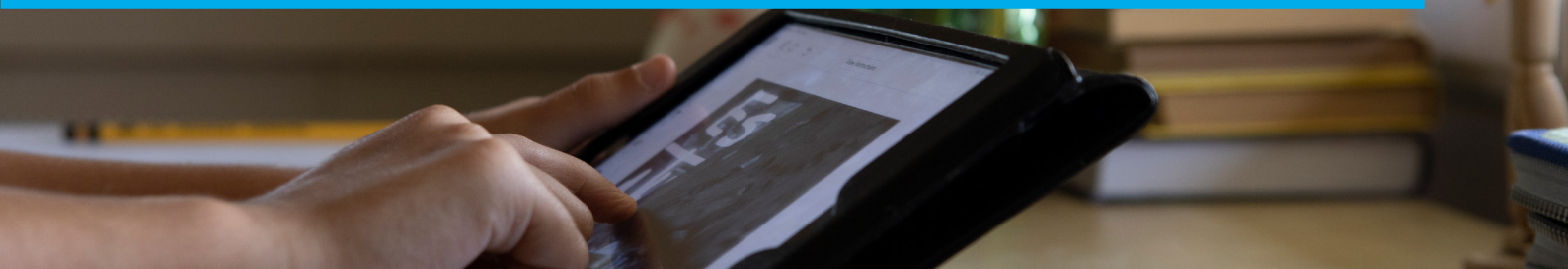
THE CHALLENGE

While there are undoubtedly huge benefits to digital service delivery and engagement – with many councils finding the digital world allows them to reach and hear from children who may have traditionally faced barriers in accessing sessions in person – the speed at which many services have moved online has left little time for local authorities to fully assess the impact on children.

If digital councils are here to stay, work needs to happen now to understand how the shift online has impacted children's rights and, if negatively, how to mitigate those impacts.

At the same time, there is a growing awareness of the gaping digital divide in the UK that prevents some of the most marginalised children and their families from accessing services, information and the opportunity to participate. These groups cannot be left behind as councils move forward.

NEW NORMAL
A UK COMMITTEE FOR UNICEF (UNICEF UK) SERIES FOR COUNCILS AND THEIR PARTNERS

THE STARTING POINT: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

6 — LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT
Every child and young person should enjoy the same opportunities to grow and develop, and local authorities have a responsibility to make this happen through the provision of **public services grounded in children's rights**, whether online or in-person.

12 — RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS
Children and young people have **the right to participate** in all matters affecting them, and should have equal opportunities to do so, whether online or in-person.

17 — ACCESS TO INFORMATION
Children and young people have **the right to reliable information** from a variety of sources, including digital and online content.
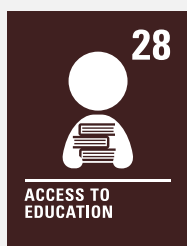
28 — ACCESS TO EDUCATION
Every child has **the right to an education** and should be equipped with the appropriate devices, software, connection and skills to access online learning.

31 — REST, PLAY, CULTURE, ARTS
Every child has **the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities**, including in the digital world.

Designs ©UNICEF, 2019

THE UNCRC

The full list of children's rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) can be found <u>here</u>.

In 2021, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted the General Comment on Children's Rights in the Digital Environment which can be found <u>here</u>.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Undertake a child rights impact assessment (CRIA) to continually assess how the move to remote service delivery, including information sharing and opportunities for participation, is impacting different groups of children and young people.

2 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, or live in digital 'not spots', and bridge this divide by providing reliable digital devices with the appropriate software and upgrades, and a strong connection.

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

4 Ensure children and young people have the online safeguards and physical privacy they need to be supported by remote services, access information and meaningfully participate.

5 Consider how, in instances where children are unable or unwilling to engage with services online, professionals can offer a safe, human response, such as through covid-safe detached youth work.

6 Ensure that accurate and relevant information regarding the reimagining of services and opportunities to participate is produced in an accessible, child-friendly format, and delivered at the same time as information for adults.

7 Work with communities to determine the best ways to share information, so that it can be done in a way that speaks to the community it seeks to inform. Involve children and young people as well as respected figures from the community such as faith leaders, youth and outreach workers, and the third sector who have a deep understanding of the communities they support.

## CASE STUDY

CARDIFF: DIGITAL DEVICES FOR ALL

Between May 2020 and March 2021, **Cardiff Council** distributed 20,017 devices and 2,491 4G mobile broadband devices to children and young people to support their online learning. In addition, every teacher was supplied with one of 3,200 laptops.

Cardiff Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Employment and Skills, Cllr Sarah Merry said: "The rollout of devices is still ongoing and supports Cardiff's wider long-term IT strategy to provide every child with the appropriate connectivity; an ambition which has been propelled by Covid-19."

Cardiff Council is one of six cities and communities across the UK taking part in the **UNICEF UK Child Friendly Cities & Communities programme (CFC)**.

Read more about how cities and communities on the programme are drawing on children's rights to bridge the digital divide here.
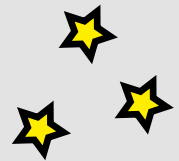
FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- *Closing the digital divide for good*: UNICEF UK report on ending digital exclusion for children and young people in the UK

- *Safe and meaningful digital engagement with children and young people:* Child Friendly Cities & Communities guidance and resources

- *Child rights impact assessment:* Child Friendly Cities & Communities template and guidance for local authorities

- *Heard but not seen: Children's right to participate under lockdown:* Child Friendly Cities & Communities article in the Local Government Association magazine

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE NEW NORMAL

This document is one in a series of recommendations for councils and their partners published monthly by the UNICEF UK Child Friendly Cities & Communities team.

Continue the series: unicef.org.uk/child-friendly-cities/new-normal