



CHILD
FRIENDLY
CITIES &
COMMUNITIES

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UNITED KINGDOM

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CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE NEW NORMAL

4. CHILDREN AT RISK

THE CHANGE

Covid-19 has affected all children, but not all children have been affected equally. For the hundreds of thousands who were already at increased risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation, the pandemic has dealt a crushing blow.

Not only did the pandemic exacerbate child poverty and worsen mental health, when schools shut, and public services paused or moved online, vital lifelines for children at risk were suddenly cut. At the same time, emergency legislation, which is no longer in place, removed certain legal protections for looked after children and young carers.

There are also many children and young people who prior to 2020 may not have been considered particularly 'vulnerable', but who, as a result of their experiences of the past two years, now fit firmly in that category.

THE CHALLENGE

Years of austerity have reduced the capacity of services to support vulnerable families in the community, or meet the needs of the children and young people in their care. The pandemic has only made these challenges in children's social care more acute.

With less money for early intervention, and more and more children moving into care, local authorities are being challenged to think creatively about how to continue delivering the incredibly important work they do.

While children's services undoubtedly need increased, predictable and long-term funding, a new approach is also urgently needed. One that places children's rights at the forefront of all local policies, services and decisions – so that even in the most challenging of times, a child's best interests always come first.

**NEW
NORMAL**

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



4. CHILDREN AT RISK



THE STARTING POINT: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



All children under 18 should enjoy all the rights set out in the UNCRC **without discrimination**.



The **best interests of the child** should be the top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.



Every child should enjoy the **same opportunities to develop to their full potential**.



Every child has **the right to be heard and for their views to be taken seriously**, including on discussions around their care.



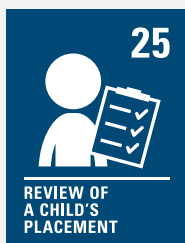
All children should have **access to support services** that promote their wellbeing, particularly those at risk of discrimination or from low-income families.



Children have the right to **protection from all forms of violence** while in the care of their parents or anyone else that looks after them.



Every child who cannot be looked after by their own family has **the right to alternative care**.



All children in care have **the right to a regular review of their care plan** and wider circumstances.

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 [here](#).



4. CHILDREN AT RISK



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Build a strong understanding of which groups of children are most at risk and ensure that they are supported to meaningfully [access local services](#), whether in-person or online. This involves understanding any barriers to engagement and ensuring no service is 'hard to reach', especially for the children and young people most in need of support.
- 2** Be mindful of the fact that many children and young people may be newly vulnerable because of the pandemic. Remain curious and be prepared to challenge assumptions. Ensure that information is collected, analysed and shared, and gaps identified, so that there is an understanding of strengths and vulnerabilities across the entire child and youth population.
- 3** Regularly evaluate services provided for children and young people at risk, as well as their families, always incorporating children's views. Ensure that opportunities to participate in evaluating services are promoted in an accessible and child-friendly way, proactively include young people who may face barriers to participating, and that any outcomes are communicated back to children.
- 4** Ensure children's best interests always come first by carrying out a [child rights impact assessment \(CRIA\)](#) whenever decisions are made about services or policies that will directly or indirectly affect children and young people.
- 5** Use child rights language when interacting with children at risk so that they are aware of, and feel confident claiming, their rights to be heard, to protection, to a regular review of their care plan etc. Tailor language so that even the youngest children understand that they are rights holders.



4. CHILDREN AT RISK



CASE STUDY

ABERDEEN: RIGHTS-BASED SERVICES



When Aberdeen first went into lockdown in spring 2020, the council and its partners set up three emergency ‘hubs’ for the city’s most marginalised children and their families. While intended to be temporary, the hubs proved to be highly valued spaces for children to learn and thrive at an incredibly difficult time.

A decision was made to keep the hubs open, and three ‘Fit Like Family Wellbeing Hubs’ now bring services together that support children and their families’ wellbeing.

The work of the hubs is informed largely by the [UNCRC](#) and children’s rights sit at the heart of the design, development and delivery of the support on offer.

Staff work collaboratively with families to help them understand their rights, make sure their voices are heard, and ensure that children’s best interests are considered in all decisions that affect them.

Aberdeen City Council is one of six cities and communities across the UK taking part in the UNICEF UK Child Friendly Cities & Communities programme.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- [*General comment on the right of the child to protection from all forms of violence*](#): Adopted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2011
- [*Child rights impact assessment*](#): Child Friendly Cities & Communities template and guidance for local authorities

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

