CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE NEW NORMAL
7. EMERGENCY PLANNING

THE CHANGE

While most councils and their community partners have considerable experience preparing for and responding to emergencies, the Covid-19 crisis threw up challenges of the like never seen, or imagined, before.

Local emergency plans had not accounted for the world of social distancing, for example, in which the frontline delivery of services had to shift largely online. In the rush to reorganise services, some failed to account for the digital divide which prevents children from the UK's most marginalised groups from accessing the internet. Many children on local authority caseloads missed key assessments and interventions — not to mention vital information about the emergency response.

At the same time, school and youth club closures meant fewer referrals, and services struggled to identify and support vulnerable children not already known to the council.

THE CHALLENGE

All emergencies, whether a pandemic or natural disaster, require an immediate response. As organisations clamber to react, however, there is danger that set processes and procedures will overwhelm the commitment to upholding children's rights in all situations.

Turning to children's rights, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is one of the most effective ways councils and their partners can protect children and young people from the worst impacts of a crisis.

The Covid-19 pandemic was not the first emergency to hit cities and communities, and it certainly won't be the last. As we adjust to the 'new normal', councils and their partners should not miss this opportunity to reflect on their emergency response, consider how integrating children's rights could have made it stronger, and take steps now to put rights at the heart of resilience arrangements.

NEW NORMAL

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

THE STARTING POINT: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

2 NO DISCRIMINATION
All children under 18 should enjoy all their rights as set out in the UNCRC in all situations and **without discrimination**.

3 BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD
The **best interests of the child** should be the top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.

4 MAKING RIGHTS REAL
Governments must do all they can to make sure that every child can access all their rights as set out in the UNCRC.

6 LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT
Every child should have the **same opportunities to develop to their full potential**.

12 RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS
Every child has **the right to be heard** on all issues that affect them.

26 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HELP
Children have **the right to benefit from social security**, including financial support, taking into account the resources and circumstances of their families.

42 EVERYONE MUST KNOW CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
Governments must take proactive steps to ensure children and adults **know about children's rights**.

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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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Ensure key decision-makers and professionals across all strategic, tactical and operational emergency response groups are trained in a child rights-based approach, so that they understand children's rights and know how to apply them in practice when emergencies hit.

2 Connect the dots between emergency response groups and the myriad local services that support children's full range of rights. Safe and well-maintained housing, for example, will strengthen children and families' resilience in times of crisis.

3 Conduct a full risk profile of the community before, during and after an emergency. Consider what constitutes risk and vulnerability to children and young people, including possible new vulnerabilities as a direct result of the emergency. Identify (a) gaps in the 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.

4 Carry out a child rights impact assessment (CRIA) to evaluate existing emergency response plans or when drafting new versions. Use the CRIA as a guide when designing mitigations to limit any negative impact on children's rights.

5 Ensure that accurate and relevant information about the emergency response is produced in an accessible and child-friendly format, and delivered at the same time as adults. Enable two-way communication, so that there is both access to information and mechanisms in place to hear directly from children and young people, particularly those most impacted by the crisis.

6 Be mindful of the fact that many children and young people may find themselves newly 'at risk' as a result of the emergency. Adapt services so that they can meet both existing and newly presenting need, with consideration for children's mental health.

CASE STUDY

LIVERPOOL: VIRTUAL COVID Q&As

As part of its commitment to uphold children's right to be heard, and with guidance from UNICEF UK on meaningful and safe digital engagement, Liverpool City Council held regular online Q&A sessions for children and young people throughout the early months of the pandemic.

These sessions, led by young people, allowed them to share their experiences of lockdown directly with the Director of Children's Services, Director of Public Health, and the Cabinet Member for Education, Employment and Skills. Time was set aside ahead of each session for young people to get comfortable in the virtual space, meet one another and ask any questions.

The Q&As directly influenced council decisions around Covid-19 (putting period products in children's centres when participants expressed concern that some young people accessed them in schools) and gave children the opportunity to feed into the local response (children wanted to volunteer during the pandemic, something the response group hadn't considered).

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

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- *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
- *UNICEF and child-centred disaster risk reduction:* see page 3 on disasters and children's rights
- *Welcoming, protecting and including refugee children:* UNICEF resource pack for local government

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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