

**County Hall
New Road
Oxford
OX1 1ND**

Chris Hilliard – Consultant Deputy
Director, Education

19 March 2020

Dear colleagues,

Uncertain times

We live in deeply unsettling times, and you have continued to offer an amazing service to staff, pupils, parents and the wider community. We are deeply grateful for all that you do, and we are sure these views are widely shared in communities throughout the county. The Secretary of State issued a statement last night. We have spoken to The Department for Education (DfE) today as we are led to believe that further information will be released on Friday 20th March 2020.

Colleagues in schools continue to keep us informed of developments in their schools via Schoolclosed@Oxfordshire.gov.uk; and that is very helpful; in turn we are keeping the DfE informed. We have received requests for clarification on a number of issues and have tried to capture those below with some being strategic and others operational.

The Department for Education has requested today that all schools in the county inform Oxfordshire County Council of plans (clearly subject to change) to open next week and numbers of children anticipated on site. This incorporates planned school collaborations. The information has already been requested today and information is requested by tomorrow morning to FIS@oxfordshire.gov.uk. We know you have so many pressures to deal with and we know that any request is an additional one. We discussed this with the Department for Education this afternoon and officials confirmed the default position is that each school is expected to make its own arrangement, but we know that in some cases clusters of schools or Trusts may work together. This level of collaboration is much appreciated.

We continue to deliver our partnership safeguarding obligations together. The Children's Social Care senior management team has considered the likely implications of all agencies' reduced staffing and school closures on the safety and welfare of children we are jointly responsible for.

We would like to reassure you that the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Locality and Community Support Services will continue to operate and contact from professionals should be made as usual by email or calling via the following addresses and numbers.

mash-children@oxfordshire.gov.uk 0345 050 7666.

LCSS.North@oxfordshire.gov.uk 0345 2412703

LCSS.South@oxfordshire.gov.uk 0345 2412608

LCSS.Central@oxfordshire.gov.uk 0345 2412705

We are also updating risk assessments for all the individual children we are working with under Early Help, Child Protection, Child in Need and Children Looked After arrangements. Some children may be facing increased risks following school closures especially those who live in households where domestic abuse is prevalent. Please be assured that children at high risk of, or experiencing neglect, will be prioritised for visits. Depending on staff availability, those visits may be carried out by a range of professionals/practitioners, not necessarily a qualified social worker. This will apply when vulnerable children are sick absent or self-isolated. In some situations, Children's Social Care staff will be contacting Core Group members to discuss shared visiting arrangements and to explore flexible and creative arrangements.

Many schools have enquired about how to support children's use of the self-advocacy app Mind of My Own which Oxfordshire County Council has invested in. These apps provide a helpful communication channel for children with us and will be especially important in current times. Further information on these apps will follow under separate cover.

The current guidance from the Department for Education indicates that schools continue to offer face to face education for children who are Looked After, on Child Protection and Child in Need plans. Please ensure that these children's Social Worker or the Virtual School is informed in the event that they do not attend.

The majority of Oxfordshire schools have logged their emails addresses and out of hours contact numbers through the electronic submission of their S157/175 safeguarding report in February. Should you need to update any of those out of hours contact details, please send them immediately to LADO.SafeguardingChildren@Oxfordshire.gov.uk. The Education Safeguarding Team can also be contacted at this address and on 01865 810603. This will ensure smooth communication should a school be closed, or if Designated Safeguarding Lead is self-isolating and working from home. These contact details will be saved securely.

We are also actively working with partners to agree creative and flexible remote methods of them contributing to Child Protection Conferences and Core Groups, Team Around the Child or Families, Child In Need reviews, and Children Looked After reviews. As Child Protection Conferences, Core Group meetings and Children Looked After reviews are deemed essential meetings to share relevant information safeguard children, the partnership aims to utilise existing shared methods of remote attendance as far as possible. This could be by using Skype for Business, conference calling or What's App video call. Please consider how you can continue to carry out your safeguarding obligations in these forums and feel free to suggest suitable options which would promote your involvement.

As ever, effective partnership working remains the key to keeping children safe and we are grateful for the continuing commitment and hard work of school staff in contributing to this.

Schools are making arrangements to pay suppliers including where practical from off site. Discussions have continued between Finance Officers both within the Council and schools in relation to budget setting. The position is complex with Headteachers and Governors engaged in some cases in refining budgets. We would simply ask that colleagues in schools keep Finance Officers included in discussions and in their thinking in relation to target dates. Schools may

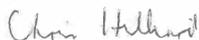
decide to dispose of surplus foods via Food Banks and local charities in accordance with the school's Business Continuity Plan.

Specific queries have arisen in relation to school closures and staffing issues. We are preparing a Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) document, which we will then update. In relation to some questions there may be no answers at present until clarification is provide nationally. Your HR provider may also be able to assist. In general, with school closures or partial closures if staff are fit and able to work, then they may be able to undertake tasks through remote working or being present in school to meet the expectations outlined by the Secretary of State.

The wider Education Service and I remain deeply grateful for all that you do particularly under these challenging and ever-changing circumstances – and at a time when you have your own personal concerns. Please continue to contact us as appropriate.

With very best wishes to you and your colleagues.

Yours faithfully



Chris Hilliard
Consultant Deputy Director – Education
Children, Education & Families
Mobile: 07881 518322
Email: chris.hilliard@oxfordshire.gov.uk
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk