March 2020



Thank you for contacting me about safeguarding children and other vulnerable people during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

During this difficult time for the country, I recognise that social distancing and other measures necessary to save lives are having a hugely disruptive impact on people’s lives. Unfortunately, this could mean that some vulnerable people are no longer accessing the support they need.

I am assured that Ministers are aware of these concerns and are working closely with all Local Authorities to ensure that vulnerable children can, where required, attend a school or college. There is an expectation that children with a social worker will attend provision, unless in consultation with the child’s social worker and family it is agreed this is not in the best interests of the child. In all circumstances where a vulnerable child does not take up their place at school or college, or discontinues, the school or college should notify their social worker.

Local Authorities continue to have the key day-to-day responsibility for delivery of children’s social care. I am told that everything is being done to ensure continuity of care for vulnerable children in the event that the workforce is significantly affected by COVID-19. This includes, through the Coronavirus Act 2020, allowing the emergency registration of social workers who have recently left the profession to expedite their registration allowing them to return to practice.

It is welcome that £3.2 billion of additional funding has been made available to local authorities to help them respond to COVID-19 pressures across all the services they deliver, including their work with vulnerable children. Additional funding has also been made available for the NSPCC to expand and promote its national helpline.

Adoptive families are being offered emergency support, including counselling and couples therapy as the scope of the Adoption Support Fund is expanded to meet needs arising from the outbreak of COVID-19. Up to £8 million will be available to pay for different types of therapeutic support for families whose adopted children may have already suffered trauma and be made more anxious owing to the uncertainty of the effects of the virus.

The Home Secretary has launched a campaign to tell victims that they can leave home to get the support they need and is providing up to £2 million to enhance online support services and helplines for domestic abuse, so that anybody who needs it can access that help and support.

Where schools are open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children, schools should continue to provide meals for pupils in attendance. Meals should be provided by the school and be free of charge for pupils who would normally receive free school meals, and schools have discretion as to whether they charge other pupils.

Under normal circumstances, schools are not expected to provide free school meals to eligible children who are not attending due to illness or if the school is closed. However, during the COVID-19 outbreak we expect schools to continue to provide support to these children if the school is only open for certain groups or closed.

Where schools are open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children, schools

laptops, routers and other devices will be provided for free to help disadvantaged children and children with social workers across England access remote education. Local Authorities Trusts and other relevant organisations overseeing schools have been given guidance on how to place online orders for devices for eligible pupils.

Thank you again for taking time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

**CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP**

**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY**