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Chief Executives of Local Authorities
Chief Executives of NHS Boards
Police Scotland Divisional Commanders
IJB Chief Officers
Chairs of Child Protection Committees
Chief Social Work Officers
Child Health Commissioners
Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland
Care Inspectorate
Education Scotland
Health Improvement Scotland
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
Scottish Social Services Council

Copy to:

Key professional groups
National Child Protection Leadership Group
Covid-19 Children and Families Leadership Group
Covid-19 Education Recovery Group

OCENHS/2022/004

24 December 2021

Dear Colleagues

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) SUPPLEMENTARY NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION GUIDANCE

We write at a time of continuing challenge in delivering, managing and leading services in the evolving COVID-19 situation. We know that our workforces are fatigued from the unrelenting pressures arising from the pandemic. We also know that assessing and managing risk of harm to children and young people is professionally and personally demanding and that the media portrayal of high profile cases can impact negatively on staff morale.

Family confinement and isolation alongside physical and psychological health impacts expose some children and young people to increased risks of harm at home and online. We have seen an increase in complexity of need in some families, and new need arising in families that would previously have managed well with limited support. The pandemic has also accentuated risks for many women and children experiencing or recovering from domestic abuse and other forms of gender based violence. Tragic recent cases where

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children have died as a result of abuse and neglect underline the complexity of child protection work and the need for continuing vigilance during this period of heightened risk.

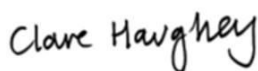
Despite the unprecedented challenges during the early weeks of the pandemic, partnerships quickly adapted and re-prioritised local child protection processes to ensure continuity of services. Practitioners adapted to different and flexible ways of working and continued to support children, young people and families in a range of ways, prioritising face to face visits using professional judgement, risk assessment and management protocols.

We attach updated COVID-19 guidance which supplements the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 and is intended to support the leadership already being demonstrated in this area. It reflects learning from earlier stages of the pandemic and is provided for Chief Officers, professional leaders in children's services and Child Protection Committees, who should ensure it is taken account of within their partnerships.

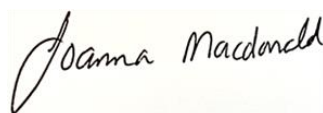
The guidance notes that the rights of children have not altered during the pandemic, nor have professional responsibilities in relation to child protection. At a time of unprecedented pressures, clear ownership and accountability by Chief Officers continues to be required to ensure that protecting children at risk of harm remains a priority within and across agencies. Chief Officers' collective leadership and collaborative decision-making remain fundamental to prompt, safe and functional continued adaptation and delivery of local protective responses. The guidance also notes the continued need for contingency plans to be in place to review adverse circumstances, associated impact and risk in relation to essential functioning of child protection arrangements across services, including levels of vacancies and absences of key personnel.

This guidance is published on the Scottish Government website at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-supplementary-national-child-protection-guidance> It will be kept under review and updated as necessary as the pandemic develops in discussion with stakeholders.

We would welcome continued dialogue with you, particularly in relation to further issues that may emerge, to assist us identify where additional actions or support may be needed. Please get in touch by email at ChildProtection@gov.scot



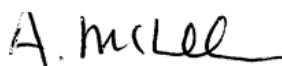
CLARE HAUGHEY MSP



Joanna MacDonald
Deputy Chief Social Work Adviser



Professor Gregor Smith
Chief Medical Officer



Professor Alex McMahon
Chief Nursing Officer

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