

Message from Yvette Stanley, Ofsted National Director Regulation and Social Care, 2 July 2021

Our monthly update for children's social care providers and local authorities:

This week we sadly lost our dear friend and colleague, Carmel Littleton, the DCS in Islington. Those of us who had the privilege of knowing or working with Carmel will miss her greatly. We at Ofsted send our condolences to all who knew her well and to her friends and family. She will be much missed, and remembered fondly.

Earlier this month, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care published 'The Case for Change'. Like many of you, we were pleased to see our evidence and advice on the challenges facing the sector reflected in the report. That said, there is a lot to reflect on and process.

As the review progresses, I intend to blog more about our perspective. Some early thoughts: it was disappointing to see the press focus on "risk averse social workers". For the most part, we see an improving sector where substantial risk is held in the community, and where our safeguarding partners would like social care to take the lead in more cases and undertake more of the statutory work. Investing in effective preventative work to enable children to stay safely in their family has to be part of the solution.

It is encouraging to see that Josh MacAlister and team are setting out the challenges and risks associated with how the children's home sector is organised, and the need for change to support the increased supply of good quality provision. This need for change was thrown into stark relief this week when we heard the news that one of Britain's biggest children's home providers has been put up for sale, and I look forward to hearing more from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) strand of the review. I remain worried about the paucity of options for those children with the most significant welfare and care needs.

On a more positive note, it was reassuring that Government have now put in place arrangements to assist in the transfer of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. While many may lament the lack of a mandatory scheme, I hope that improving the financial support for new arrivals, and those who are care leavers, will translate into better experiences for these vulnerable young people, and help to ease the burden for local authorities with ports of entry.

Almost a year on from our emergence from the first COVID-19 lockdown, we continue to hope that restrictions will come to an end soon. But I know we all agree that for our most vulnerable children and families, the impact of the pandemic will continue to affect their quality of life for many months, and potentially years, to come.

I continue to salute you, the children's social care workforce, for your resilience, compassion and adaptability in these difficult times.

Implications for commissioning of our suspension of routine inspection during 2020-21

We have today shared the following message with Directors of Children's Services:

We resumed routine inspections of social care providers under the SCCIF in April 2021 and we are now publishing reports with new inspection judgements. However, the suspension of routine inspections from March 2020 to April 2021 means that the length of time between judgements for a large number of providers will be longer than usual.

Decisions about where children should live and receive help should always take into account a range of factors including, where relevant, evidence from recent Ofsted inspections and visits. Commissioning arrangements may need to be more flexible and be able to take the circumstances of the last year into account rather than relying on outdated judgements. The most recent inspection judgement of a provider may not be current, and therefore be less valuable to commissioners' decision-making than previously.

You will be aware that assurance and monitoring visits happened while routine inspections were suspended. As part of the broad range of factors to consider when making the best decisions for children, we would expect that any reports from these visits inform commissioners' decisions and not just a pre-pandemic inspection judgement.

Providers of children's social care – Ofsted's annual, registration and variation fees for financial year 2021/22

In April 2020, the Minister for Children and Families wrote to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) about the fees that Ofsted is required in regulation to charge to providers of children's social care.

The [regulations](#) had set out changes to the registration, variation and annual fees that should have been charged to providers from 1 April 2020, had the COVID-19 pandemic not happened. The Minister, at that time, instructed Ofsted to charge registration and annual fees at the 2019-20 rates and to waive the collection of the variation to conditions of registration fees for the entirety of 2020-21.

On 15 June 2021, the Minister wrote again to HMCI to say that these changes should remain in place for a second year due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19. The Department for Education (DfE) laid the [Adoption and Children \(Coronavirus\)\(Amendment\) Regulations 2021](#) which came into force on 31 March 2021. This legislation amended the registration, annual and variation fees so that these continue to be frozen at 2019-20 rates and the variation to conditions of registration fees will continue to be disapplied for the entirety of 2021/22.

In keeping with HM Treasury directive, it is the DfE's intention to increase fees in future years so as to reach full-cost recovery for all providers. Any increase in fees will be subject to consultation by the DfE at that time.

Children's social care questionnaires 2021: what children and young people

told Ofsted

In June, we published the annual [children's social care questionnaire summary report](#). The survey ran from 1 February to 28 March 2021. We received the highest number of responses to our survey we have ever had.

This report summarises what children have told us about their experiences of where they live or stay, including whether they feel well cared for, how safe they feel where they live or stay, and if they have someone to go to if they are feeling upset or worried. Additionally, we asked children about their experiences of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

We would like to thank everyone who took time to complete the survey and those who passed the surveys on to children and others involved in children's social care services. The information helps to inform our inspections and to provide a good overview of children's experiences across the range of settings we inspect.

Notifying Ofsted of serious incidents – online form for registered providers

We previously told you about the online form for informing Ofsted about serious events or incidents. We ask that registered providers use this form to send us this information.

The form and relevant guidance is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tell-ofsted-about-an-incident-childrens-social-care-notification>. The form is only available at this 'gov.uk' web address.

When accessing the form through Ofsted online please make sure that you click on the social care serious notification and not on early years serious notification. Your first page should list social care settings. To check you have made a successful submission, you should have received a confirmation email from Ofsted forms (ofsted.forms@notifications.service.gov.uk), with the heading 'Ofsted received your serious incident report'. If you have not received this email then your form has not been successfully submitted to us.

Sending independent visitor reports and quality of care reviews to Ofsted

Social care registered providers are required by regulations to send certain reports to Ofsted when they have been produced. We also ask some providers to share with us reports they have prepared under certain national minimum standards (NMS). These include:

- children's homes and secure children's homes – reports under regulations 44 and 45
- independent fostering agencies – reports under regulation 35 and NMS 25
- residential family centres – reports under regulations 23 and 25

- voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies - reports under NMS 25
- residential holiday schemes for disabled children - reports made under regulations 29 and 30

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), there are likely to be delays in reviewing incoming post. Therefore, we ask that you send in these reports via email instead of post as this is the most effective way of sending us information at the moment.

Please email them to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk and include Ofsted's unique reference number (URN) for your service and the date on which any visit occurred.

If you are a children's home, please pass this message to your independent visitor on our behalf.

I hope this update is helpful to you. If you have any further queries or feedback, please send them to EYRegulatoryandSocialCare@ofsted.gov.uk. We will send our next update on 6 August 2021.

Best wishes,

Yvette.