



Department  
for Education

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Jill Colbert  
Director of Children's Services  
Sunderland City Council/  
Chief Executive Together for Children  
Civic Centre  
Burdon Road  
Sunderland  
SR2 7DN

18th June 2020

Dear Ms Colbert

## **SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL STATUTORY DIRECTION**

I am writing to you in relation to the Statutory Direction issued to Sunderland City Council on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education.

We are aware that local authorities and children's services trusts are facing unprecedented pressures arising from the Covid-19 crisis in addition to carrying out normal children's social work activity to ensure children are safe and protected from harm. We know you and your teams will be doing everything you can to keep children safe during this unprecedented time.

As part of these efforts, it is critical that local authorities and children's services trusts continue their focus on improving services. The pressures created by Covid-19 are a reminder of how important it is that we tackle longer-standing challenges in children's social care services, to ensure that we can deliver effective and efficient services that meet the needs of children and families.

We are working closely with local authorities and children's services trusts where there is a Statutory Direction in place to understand the impact of Covid-19 and support them in implementing robust response plans. The Statutory Direction specifies certain requirements which we recognise may be a challenge for you to meet in the current climate. In these exceptional circumstances we are confirming the following flexibilities to enable you to deliver your responsibilities at this challenging time while continuing your improvement journey:

- a) Improvement boards to be held virtually with an expectation that all usual board members or their representatives will attend, including statutory partners and education leads occurring every 6 weeks at the very least.
- b) Improvement boards can be re-focussed to support management of Covid-19 and partnership response to key issues.

- c) Improvement plans to be monitored and updated with delivery risks due to Covid-19 clearly identified.
- d) DfE review meetings to be scheduled virtually when necessary and within 3 months of the original timeframe, involving key individuals. These meetings should focus on progress to date as well impact of Covid-19 to service delivery.

These measures have been agreed after careful consideration, taking into account your position in terms of improvement and feedback from your Caselead.

While offering these flexibilities, our focus continues to be to ensure that children are safe and protected from harm and we expect that you will maintain momentum in progressing the improvement objectives outlined in the Statutory Direction. If we become concerned about progress, we will take quick action to address this.

Please note that these are temporary measures for the duration of the Covid 19 crisis and there is an expectation that once you have returned to business as usual, you will return to the priorities and timeframes specified in your Statutory Direction. As ever, please continue to work closely with your Caselead as you make progress and to keep plans under review.

I am copying this letter to Patrick Melia, Chief Executive, Councillor Graeme Miller, Leader of the council and Paul Moffat, Chair of Sunderland Trust, Together for Children. The letter will be published on the .Gov webpage - we will confirm with you when this has been done.

Yours sincerely



**Matthew Edwards**  
**Deputy Director, Children's Social Care, Improvement and Interventions**