

## Lords Public Services Committee

### Report: A critical juncture for public services - lessons from COVID-19

#### Recommendations and responses

**Preventable long-term diseases disproportionately affect the UK's poorest communities. People who are obese, who smoke, who are diabetic and who live in unhealthy social, economic and physical environments are at higher risk of dying from COVID-19. (Paragraph 36)**

#### Government response

Public Health England, the Office for National Statistics and academia have published research and analysis demonstrating that some groups of the population are more at risk from COVID-19 than others. Further analysis of the evidence as the pandemic progresses will inform our learning. Research is considered by SAGE, which provides evidence based scientific advice to the government to inform the response to the pandemic.

**An approach to public health that focused on preventing health inequalities over the long term would pay dividends by increasing the resilience of communities and reducing pressures on the NHS when a crisis occurs. If such an approach had been adopted before the pandemic, it would have reduced the number of deaths resulting from COVID-19. (Paragraph 37)**

#### Government response

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed areas in our economy and the inequalities in our society that mean the most vulnerable people have been hit the hardest. As we recover, we have an opportunity to build back better and stronger than before.

The NHS Plan contains a number of commitments and as a condition of receiving Long Term Plan funding, all major national programmes and every local area across England is required to set out specific measurable goals and mechanisms by which they will contribute to narrowing health inequalities over the next five and ten years.

NHSEI published Phase 3 of its COVID-19 response at the end of July. This urged all NHS Trusts to work collaboratively with local communities and partners to take urgent action to increase the scale and pace of progress of reducing health inequalities and regularly assess this progress. It recommended urgent actions, developed by an expert national advisory group including:

- Protect the most vulnerable from COVID-19, with enhanced analysis and community engagement, to mitigate the risks associated with relevant protected characteristics.
- Restore NHS services inclusively, so that they are used by those in greatest

need, guided by new, core performance monitoring of service use and outcomes among those from the most deprived neighbourhoods and from Black and Asian groups.

- Accelerate preventative programmes which proactively engage those at greatest risk of poor health outcomes.
- All NHS organisations should proactively review and ensure the completeness of patient ethnicity data.

The [recent letter to NHS systems from NHS England and NHS Improvement](#) on priorities for 2021/22 reiterated the importance of addressing health inequalities. This includes auditing progress against the eight actions, as well as reducing variation in outcomes across the major clinical specialties and making progress on reducing inequalities for people with learning disabilities or serious mental illness, including ensuring access to high-quality health checks.

In addition to this the NHS Long Term Plan commits all national programmes and all local areas to set out what steps they will take to reduce inequalities over the next five and ten years.

**The Government’s commitment in its 2019 general election manifesto to extend healthy life expectancy by five years by 2035—and to narrow the gap between the richest and poorest—is welcome. It should now publish its strategy to achieve this manifesto commitment and its response to the green paper *Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s*. Both documents should set out how central Government will work in active partnership with individuals, communities, local government, the NHS, businesses and charities to design and deliver preventative services to improve the health of the poorest communities. (Paragraph 38)**

#### Government response

We are determined to level up health life expectancy across our country. We are committed to ensuring people can enjoy at least five extra years of healthy, independent life by 2035 and reducing the gaps between rich and poor. We must integrate good health into housing, transport, education, welfare and the economy because we all know preventing ill health – mental and physical – is about more than just healthcare.

The best way to improve life expectancy is to prevent health problems from arising in the first place.

We are working across government, supporting the Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch MP, on her mandate to examine COVID-19 disparities experienced by the BAME community. The Minister for Equalities’ first report was published on 22 October

2020 presents a review of our activity so far and gives clear recommendations which the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has accepted.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MCHLG) is the lead department for cross government levelling up and we are working closely with MCHLG to ensure that health inequalities are addressed at every level.

The Prevention Green Paper, Advancing our health: Prevention in the 2020s outlined commitments with varying timelines, regarding the services we receive, the choices we make and the conditions in which we live. The Government response to the consultation has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will update on the response to the Prevention Green Paper in due course.

**The Government should confirm as soon as possible how preventative services will be delivered, either through the new National Institute for Health Protection or other agencies. It should also confirm how the National Institute for Health Protection's relationship with and accountability to the Department for Health and Social Care will differ from that of its predecessor, Public Health England. (Paragraph 39)**

#### Government response

Work has begun to support the formal and full establishment of the National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP). The accountability arrangements of the new body, including how the Department of Health and Social Care will hold NIHP to account, will be set out in the Framework Agreement which will be published when the organisation is formally established in Spring 2021.

We are considering the best future arrangements for the wide range of Public Health England's non-health protection functions that are vital to support health improvement, prevention and delivery of health services and we will be setting out further details of our approach in due course.

**We recommend that the Home Office and Ministry of Justice draw up joint guidance on how the police, the prison system and National Probation Service should work with homelessness, mental health and addiction services to support people whose complex needs may have deteriorated during the pandemic. It should also outline the level of resource that the police and justice system should invest in preventative services (Paragraph 44)**

#### Government response

The Ministry of Justice and Home Office will consider the recommendation carefully, in consultation with government partners, policing, prisons and probation, and providers of support services.

On 10 December 2020 the government announced that £46 million from the Shared Outcomes Fund would be used for a new programme - Changing Futures: changing systems to support adults experiencing multiple disadvantage. MoJ and HO are key partners in this cross-government work, led by MHCLG, which will test innovative approaches and improve outcomes for people experiencing multiple disadvantage including a combination of homelessness, offending, substance misuse, domestic abuse and poor mental health. The programme is funded until 2022/23 and aims to achieve outcomes at an individual, service and system level. This builds on the learning from the successful Troubled Families Programme which incentivises coordinated local support for families experiencing multiple problems.

**There is a serious risk that disadvantaged children will fall further behind as a result of school closures during the pandemic. The Government should set out how it will support early intervention in education services to close the attainment gap, reduce exclusions and ensure that disadvantaged children's education will not suffer adverse long-term effects from the first lockdown. The Government should consult with Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner on how to hold schools to account and measure progress made in supporting disadvantaged children to catch up. (Paragraph 50)**

#### Government response

Every child and young person in the country has experienced unprecedented disruption to their education as a result of COVID-19. Those from the most vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be the hardest hit. The government has announced a catch up package worth £1bn, including a 'Catch up Premium' worth a total of £650m to support schools to make up for lost teaching time.

Alongside this, we have also announced a National Tutoring Programme (NTP) for disadvantaged pupils which will provide additional, targeted support for those children and young people who need the most help to catch-up. The programme for schools launched in November and has almost 90,000 pupils enrolled on it; support will continue to be provided throughout the academic year, with contingency plans in place to support those pupils who are not currently at school. The NTP also supports small group tuition via a 16-19 tuition fund and a targeted early language support programme.

The Government is committed to early intervention in education services to close the attainment gap. To this end we have ensured schools continue to receive the pupil premium again this year, worth £2.4bn, so they can respond to the current challenge. Schools can use this grant for tutoring and other high impact activities recommended by the Education Endowment Foundation. This is in combination with the £9 million investment into the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI), as part of the NTP set out above. This is a robustly evidenced programme, proven to improve oral language skills.

We recognise children and young people value the structure and routine of regular attendance as well as the support and strong positive relationships provided by their school. We recognise that attending school may be more difficult for some children and young people and schools and colleges should work with them and their families and carers so that they receive the education, therapeutic/specialist support, and reasonable adjustments that they need. This may contribute to disengagement with education, resulting in issues which could lead to increased incidence of poor behaviour. The Department is advising school leaders to be mindful that disruptive behaviour might be the result of unmet educational or other needs and to consider whether a multiagency assessment may be necessary.

To assist all school leaders and staff, we developed and published a [behaviour and attendance tool](#) for mainstream schools to support the re-engagement of pupils. Schools and specialist settings should update their behaviour policy to reflect the new protective measures, as well as any new rules. If a pupil's behaviour warrants disciplinary action, the normal rules apply and the disciplinary powers, including expulsion. If a pupil's behaviour warrants disciplinary action, the normal rules apply and the disciplinary powers, including expulsion. Expulsion should only be used as a last resort and must be lawful, reasonable, and fair. Where a child with a social worker is at risk of expulsion, their social worker should be informed and involved in relevant conversations. Headteachers should, as far as possible, avoid expelling any pupil with an Education, Health and Care Plan. Ofsted will continue to consider expulsions, including the rates, patterns and reasons for expulsion and to look for any evidence of off-rolling. Off-rolling is never acceptable and we are clear that schools placing pressure on parents to remove their child from the school (including to home educate their child) is a form of off-rolling. Understanding the impact of Covid disruption on attainment and progress is a key research priority for the Government, and we have commissioned an independent research and assessment agency to consider catch up needs and monitor progress over the course of the year.

The Government announced in December the intention that routine, graded Ofsted school inspections will not be reintroduced until the summer term. During the spring term, it is intended that inspectors will conduct monitoring visits in schools most in need of support – inadequate schools and some schools that require improvement. These monitoring visits will not be graded and will have focus on matters that are particularly relevant at this time and will have a strong focus on the quality of remote education being provided. Inspectors will be sensitive to the school's context, and support schools to prioritise the right actions. The Government will continue to engage with Ofsted during the spring term as it prepares for the resumption of routine, graded inspections. These inspections will have a clear focus on how all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are being supported. Inspectors will evaluate how the curriculum is being planned and implemented so that it has the maximum impact on

helping pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, gain the knowledge they need to achieve success.

**Successive governments have failed to invest sufficiently in a preventative approach to health, education, justice and other public services. Investing in future potential can be difficult for governments due to a political cycle that prioritises immediate returns over long-term benefits to future generations; cost over social value; and the measurement of increased outputs over improved outcomes. (Paragraph 51)**

**The Government should recognise that investing in prevention and early intervention can reduce the pressures placed on the NHS and the justice system, and that supporting children to avoid poor life outcomes brings financial savings and economic benefits. A future inquiry might investigate further a preventative approach to public services. (Paragraph 52)**

#### Government response

The government agrees that the success of spending decisions is measured by their impact on people's daily lives and the outcomes that this delivers and recognises the strong case for prevention and early intervention in public services.

The government has a number of initiatives focussed on prevention. For example, the NHS Long Term Plan committed to ensuring at least 900,000 people will be referred to social prescribing by 2023-24, helping people benefit from community-based activities which complement medical treatment as part of personalised care. In addition, the government published its strategy 'Tackling obesity: empowering adults and children to live healthier lives' in July 2020, covering plans to reduce adult and childhood obesity, helping to get the nation fit and healthy, protect against Covid-19 and protect the NHS. The government has also committed £2 billion over this Parliament for new cycling and walking infrastructure and initiatives, making healthier habits easier and supporting the government's ambition to double cycling and increase walking by 2025.

At Spending Round 2019, the government announced £200 million for the Shared Outcomes Fund to fund pilot projects which test innovative ways of working across the public sector. Some of the pilots funded by the first round focus on prevention including £4.3 million to scale up green social prescribing services and £20 million to test ways to improve the social inclusion of people leaving prison and reduce reoffending.

The funding provided at Spending Review 2020 also supports the government's commitment to prevention, early intervention and better outcomes across public services including health and social care, the criminal justice system and education.

Spending Review 2020 provides £9.4 million to improve maternity safety, including through pilots aimed at reducing incidence of birth-related brain injuries. Continuing to improve safety in healthcare is important not just in itself, but it may also bring financial savings in reduced clinical negligence costs. The government will publish a consultation later this year on clinical negligence and patient safety.

The Spending Review also increases the value of Healthy Start Vouchers, helping combat child food poverty and give children the best start in life, and maintains funding for local authority spending through the public health grant into next year to invest in prevention and frontline services. The government remains committed to improving the population's health and will set out further significant actions that it is taking in the coming months. The Spending Review also provides funding to support children in their early years and ensure that children and young people can get the knowledge, skills and qualifications they need to succeed now and in the future. To prevent crime, provide better supervision and rehabilitation of offenders and reduce reoffending, the government will invest in probation reforms and wider public services that tackle the causes of reoffending, including through funding for employment programmes, rough sleeping and substance misuse.

Through Spending Review 2020, the government has placed a renewed emphasis on outcomes and high-quality evaluation. This will support departments to improve their understanding of what works and to deliver their long-term policy objectives, from reducing crime to improving education standards across the country. This allows the government to invest in the UK's recovery from Covid-19 across all nations and regions, deliver on its promises to the British people, and take a long-term view to developing the future potential of the UK.

**Before COVID-19, vulnerable children were falling through the gaps between public service providers, “invisible” to social services, the NHS and the education system. Many more have become “invisible” during the pandemic since losing contact with public services. (Paragraph 61)**

**The Government should urgently develop a cross-agency strategy which would support vulnerable children in, or at risk of, crisis and ensure that public services do not lose touch with children during future crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of this strategy, the Troubled Families Programme and community services that facilitate multi-agency support for families such as children's centres and family hubs should be extended. Schools should have Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services professionals, police liaison officers and youth workers who can collaborate to address vulnerable children's needs. (Paragraph 66)**

Government response

The safety and wellbeing of the most vulnerable is a key priority of this Government. Throughout the pandemic, national and local stakeholders have worked to protect and support vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Ensuring vulnerable children remain supported and visible during the outbreak has been a critical focus of the Government's work. That's why from the outset of the pandemic, including the period of national lockdown announced on 4 January, the Government has kept primary, secondary, alternative provision, special schools and further education open to vulnerable children and young people. Vulnerable children and young people are strongly encouraged to attend their education setting and we expect schools to offer a place to all vulnerable children and children of critical workers. Our focus from the outset has always been to keep eyes on vulnerable children and young people. Where vulnerable children and young people cannot attend education provision (including post-16), we have asked local authorities and educational settings to ensure they have systems in place to keep in touch with them.

Throughout all restrictions to date, children's social care services and early help services have continued to support vulnerable children and young people and their families. We will continue to ensure this is the case during this period of national restrictions.

Furthermore, we set up Social Work Together, which brought 8,000 more social workers back to register and established a Children's Social Care survey to local authorities to ensure we had an accurate picture of contact between social workers and children known to be vulnerable.

Helping public services and charities to work together to identify vulnerable children at risk of falling through the gaps is critical. We have therefore invested millions of pounds in charities and other services who work with vulnerable children and their families to support them and spot the signs of abuse and neglect more quickly. For example, as part of this wider strategic approach, the Government has provided:

- £4.6 billion of funding to support councils through the COVID crisis, this is part of an unprecedented level of additional financial support in recent times.
- £9.5 million to fund research by What Works for Children's Social Care to develop interventions to improve outcomes for children who need or have needed a social worker. The package includes £6.5 million to place social workers in schools in 21 local authorities to help teachers to identify signs of children at risk of exploitation or neglect and improve joint working between schools and LAs.
- £7 million to the See, Hear, Respond service led by Barnardo's. As well as online and face to face support, this includes youth work and crisis support particularly for those at risk of or experiencing various forms of exploitation, including criminal exploitation. An additional £4.2 million has been made available to enable the programme to continue until March 2021, supporting vulnerable

children who fall below the threshold for statutory support and early help, including those in need of crisis support due to the pandemic.

- £7.6 million through the Vulnerable Children National Charities Strategic Relief Fund to support national charities operating in England and Wales, who have suffered significant financial distress due to Covid-19. These charities are working to safeguard vulnerable children from a range of harms including child sexual exploitation, serious violence, peer and relationships abuse and online harm.
- £1.6 million to expand and promote the NSPCC's helpline, offering advice and support on how to raise concerns about children at risk. Demand for the helpline peaked in May/June when the number of contacts was almost 50% higher than the pre-lockdown average. This was a result of a UK wide marketing campaign to encourage members of the public to seek advice and report their concerns to the helpline. The service has seen sustained levels of high demand with the number of child welfare contacts handled by the service up 26% up in October on pre-lockdown levels. A further £190k has recently been approved to ensure sufficient helpline capacity and enable responses to increased pressures, until the end of March 2021.
- Additional funding of £310,000 for Childline to modify and enhance the service for children and young people being put at increased risk of harm by isolation.
- Funding for 'Operation Encompass': a scheme that ensures police liaise with schools following attendance at domestic abuse incidents so teachers can support children affected by domestic abuse. Operation Encompass also provides teachers with additional support through a national helpline staffed by psychologists.
- Substantial investments in mental health support, including £8 million to launch a new training scheme, Wellbeing for Education Return. This is run by mental health experts to improve the support schools and colleges can offer young people, staff or parents dealing with additional pressures, bereavement, anxiety, stress or other emotional responses to the pandemic. Over £10 million has also been invested in mental health charities to help families and children during the pandemic, allowing them to expand and reach those most in need.

The Government notes the Committee's comments on the Troubled Families Programme and is committed to extending it and other community services that facilitate multi-agency support for families such as family hubs. The Troubled Families Programme has already made a huge difference to the lives of hundreds of thousands of vulnerable children and their families and at the Spending Review 2020, the Chancellor announced the extension of this work, making up to £165 million available for the programme in 2021-22. For many families, Covid-19 has brought additional pressures and exacerbated existing problems such as financial issues, unemployment, domestic abuse and mental health, all of which are key issues for the Troubled Families Programme.

Early Help and Family Support teams are playing a vital role in responding to Covid-19, working with their partners and the voluntary and community sector to ensure that vulnerable children and young people do not fall through the cracks and support those at an increased risk of abuse and exploitation. These teams have adopted innovative ways of working throughout the pandemic, including switching to online or virtual methods, with face-to-face contact continuing where necessary. Next year's programme will continue to use data to drive system change, both locally and nationally. It will work to build the resilience of families – including the most vulnerable families affected by COVID-19 – by providing early, effective and joined up support from the right services.

This support sits alongside the Government's manifesto commitment to continue to champion Family Hubs. The Chancellor announced funding of £2.5 million in March 2020 for research and the development of best practice around the integration of services for families, including family hubs, and how best to support vulnerable children. Linked to this, in December 2020, the Government launched a procurement for a National Centre for Family Hubs whose role would be to champion family hubs and work with councils to develop and spread best practice.

Youth services are also a vital component of the wider approach to support vulnerable children and young people. In November 2020 the Government announced £16.5 million for the Youth Covid-19 Support Fund to protect the immediate future of community and national youth organisations across the country supporting vulnerable young people. The fund will help to mitigate the impact of lost income during the winter period due to Covid-19, and ensure services providing vital support can remain open. This investment will also fund a range of training opportunities for youth workers to help them respond to the emerging needs of young people as they emerge from the crisis.

Furthermore, the Government has invested £70 million of the £176.5 million Serious Violence Fund to Violence Reduction Units (VRUs). VRUs bring together police, local government, health and education professionals, community leaders and other key partners to identify the drivers of serious violence and agree a multi-agency response to them. This funding has led to the development of a range of activities to respond to these drivers, such as improved data quality and sharing, and a range of interventions such as parental/ family support, mental health support, and provision of youth workers. VRUs have also played a key role in leading co-ordinated local responses to COVID-19 in helping support the most vulnerable children at risk of serious violence. In addition, since October 2018 the Government launched the ten-year £200m Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), focused on targeted early intervention with those children and young people most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence. On 6 May 2020, the YEF launched a new £6.5 million COVID-19 grant round to support vulnerable

young people, aged 10 to 14, at risk of youth violence. It will fund and evaluate the best ways to reach vulnerable children and young people during a period of social distancing.

The Government has now published its Wellbeing and Mental Health Support Plan for COVID-19, backed by £50 million, to set out the steps taken to strengthen the support available for people, including vulnerable children and young people, who are struggling. In the long term, the Government remains committed to the joint green paper delivery programme with DHSC and NHSE, including introducing new mental health support teams for all schools and colleges, providing training for senior mental health leads in schools and colleges, and testing approaches to faster access to NHS specialist support. Where already established, Mental Health Support Teams have been adapting their services to continue supporting children and young people remotely during the pandemic.

**The Government should study New Zealand’s “joint ventures” to understand better how central Government can encourage cross-agency collaboration on complex social problems. (Paragraph 67)**

#### Government response

Spending Review 2020 looked across departmental boundaries and encouraged collaboration between departments when considering priorities and appropriate policy measures. At Spending Round 2019, HM Treasury announced a £200 million Shared Outcomes Fund for cross-departmental pilot projects, and in Spending Review 2020, a further £200 million was allocated to fund a second round of projects.

The Government has also launched cross-cutting reviews in key areas such as the Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review (Integrated Review) and the Net Zero review. Cabinet Office and HM Treasury will continue to work with and support departments as we develop the Government’s approach to joint-working and delivery.

Key cross-cutting government priorities are overseen by Cabinet Sub Committees, for example the Crime and Justice Taskforce. In addition, the Government has also strengthened cross-Government accountability through the appointment of Ministers whose portfolios sit across at least two departments, for example the Minister for Efficiency and Transformation, and multi departmental senior civil service boards. Joint units of officials are shared between departments where there are overlapping remits, covering topics from veterans’ affairs to connected and autonomous vehicles.

The Government will continue to look at a wide variety of international exemplars, including New Zealand’s joint ventures approach as we develop our plans for reform.

**Covid-19 should be a wake-up call for the Government that the designers and providers of public services have paid insufficient attention to the specific needs of minority groups. The Public Sector Equality Duty has had limited success; Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups experience significant inequalities of access. These inequalities have worsened since the beginning of the pandemic. (Paragraph 75)**

**The Government should introduce a race equality strategy that would apply across public services and address inequalities of access for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. Such a strategy should include joint targets, shared by all relevant service providers and supported by voluntary sector organisations working directly with these groups, to tackle persistent inequalities in health and educational outcomes. The strategy should investigate the links between such inequalities (Paragraph 76).**

**Service providers should respond to race equality targets by developing clear implementation plans to meet them. The Government should set out the role of regulators in holding public services accountable for these implementation plans and targets. (Paragraph 77)**

#### Government response

The Race Disparity Unit currently performs the function of identifying and working with departments to address inequalities across public services, including health and education.

In response to its findings, Government has taken action to address disparities in criminal justice, increasing diversity in employment, mental health, school exclusions, and barriers to progress for young people.

In addition last year the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities was established in order to examine all aspects of continuing racial and ethnic disparities in Britain.

It is building on the work of the Race Disparity Unit. The Commission is carrying out a deeper examination of what the causes of these disparities are, and is seeking to establish what works to address them effectively.

The Commission will aim to report to the PM by the end of February, and is being supported by the Race Disparity Unit.

**The pandemic has shown that designing public services without consulting the people who use them embeds fundamental weaknesses such as inequalities of access. Users often have a better understanding of the outcomes that they would expect to see from public services, and involving user voice in service design increases the resilience of those services . (Paragraph 84)**

**‘Co-production’ can embed service delivery innovations of the kind that have developed since the pandemic began, and in a cost-effective manner. In its response to this report the Government should confirm how it will encourage ‘co-production’ in the commissioning of public services, and how it will measure the levels of involvement in service design by groups of service users such as disabled people and those from BAME backgrounds. (Paragraph 86)**

#### Government response

The Government recognises the value of co-production and designing services with, and around, those who use them. Co-production with users and stakeholders can embed fairness, service innovation, efficacy and co-benefits at all stages of the policy process, including delivery. Over the past six years, the UK Government’s Policy Lab has incorporated this philosophy in over 100 projects with Departments and Agencies across Government, almost all of which involved co-production with citizens and UK residents. This includes, for example, creating and working with a Youth Steering Group and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, to explore the role that young people can play in government policy consultations and programme design. More information is available here:

<https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/13/policy-lab-collaborates-with-young-people-to-win-the-cabinet-office-innovator-award-2019/>

Policy Lab has now redeployed its citizen-centred methodology to consider how different groups of service users, such as disabled people and those from BAME backgrounds, have been affected by COVID-19 and the associated national and local lockdowns. Policy Lab has also recently joined with the Policy Profession Unit to integrate the citizen-centred innovation approach more systemically across the Civil Service. The ambition is to embed co-production into policy training and development, supported by best practice case studies and the continued offer of supporting demonstration projects with Government Departments and Agencies. The intended outcome is, amongst other things, to embed service delivery innovations of the kind that the Committee notes have developed since the pandemic began, in a cost-effective manner.

**Local authorities and central Government should set out how they will support homelessness, mental health and addiction service providers to involve people with ‘lived experience’—and the voluntary organisations that advocate on their behalf—in the design and delivery of services. (Paragraph 85)**

#### Government response

We recognise the importance of building lived experience and the voice of service users into policy development. MHCLG’s Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel is made up of representatives from the homelessness and rough sleeping sector and includes

representation from Expert Link, an organisation which works to champion the voice of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage to influence national and local policy.

DHSC is committed to working with and through our national and international partners and stakeholders, including those with lived experience, across all sectors, to develop and deliver our policies. Service user representatives were engaged with extensively in the development of the reforms to the Mental Health Act, set out in our forthcoming White Paper.

PHE provides guidance to service commissioners and providers which promotes the involvement of service users in the design and development of services (Service user involvement in alcohol and drug misuse treatment - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))). This includes in their own care, service delivery, the strategic delivery of services, and in development recovery communities. PHE supports local areas to do this.

On 10 December the Government announced £46m from the Shared Outcomes Fund for a new programme - Changing Futures: changing systems, to support adults experiencing multiple disadvantage. The prospectus invites expressions of interest from local partnerships who will be expected involve people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage in the design, delivery and evaluation of improved services and in governance and decision making.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated the systemic frailties in the care sector, with the tragic consequence of a large number of deaths in care homes and domiciliary care settings. Reform is now more urgent than ever. (Paragraph 101)**

#### Government response

Our country's adult social care system has never been under such pressure as over the last year. The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges to the sector and beyond.

As set out in the Spending Review, the government is committed to sustainable improvement of the adult social care system and will bring forward proposals this year. Putting social care on a sustainable footing, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, is one of the biggest challenges that our society faces.

We want to ensure that every person receives care that provides the dignity and security they deserve. This is a complex area and a range of options are being considered.

**In recent years much has been written about the lack of integration between health and social care and the need to provide adequate funding for social care. The problem of fragmentation of services is understood, but no priority has been given to creating coordinated services on the ground. (Paragraph 102)**

**Closer integration and equality between health and social care will require Government action in three key areas. The fragility of adult social care should be addressed by providing the sector with adequate funding; the Government should give social care equal visibility and priority to health care; and the two sectors should integrate data collection and share data more effectively. (Paragraph 103)**

#### Government response

The Government continues to support the integration of health and social care, with the ultimate aim of creating a more seamless and effective experience of care for people. We recognise the importance of joining up care services around a person's needs so that, from their perspective, it feels like all care is being provided by one service. This has the potential to generate significant health benefits to the population, such as increased independence, improved quality of care and higher patient satisfaction.

The Better Care Fund (BCF) is the national policy driving forward the integration of health and social care in England. It has done this by enabling greater cooperation between health and social care partners at a local level. The budgets reflect that cooperation: local areas have voluntarily pooled over £2.7 billion above the minimum required into the BFC in 2019-20.

We have also recently appointed a Chief Nurse for Adult Social Care to provide professional leadership to social care nursing and the wider care workforce and boost the status, profile and standards of nursing in social care. The role will act as a bridge across the health and care system, reinforcing the value of social care nursing; enhancing clinical skills within social care; and building on the system-wide collaboration we've seen during COVID-19 to improve partnership-working across health and social care.

The support we have provided to the sector as part of the Covid-19 response will set out the foundations for future digital transformation, and has demonstrated the potential for digital tools and technologies to improve care outcomes. We remain committed to longer term digital transformation and closer integration with the NHS.

As set out in the Spending Review, the government is committed to sustainable improvement of the adult social care system and will bring forward proposals this year. We want to ensure that every person receives care that provides the dignity and

security they deserve. This is a complex area and a range of options are being considered.

Over the course of the pandemic, we have monitored NHSE data on discharge flows into adult social care settings to ensure that there are no significant delays in individuals getting the right care that they need, and to ensure that individuals being discharged to a care home setting are tested prior to discharge.

Throughout the response to the pandemic social care has been a priority for the government. This has been boosted by the creation of a dedicated Director General led group within the Department of Health and Social Care which has been able to provide visibility and leadership to the Department's response.

**The Government should commit at the earliest opportunity to an interim sustainable funding settlement for adult social care. The Government has delayed the publication of its white paper on the long-term funding, integration and reform of the sector. This should be published as a matter of urgency. (Paragraph 104)**

#### Government response

We are providing councils with access to over an additional £1 billion to fund social care in 2021/22.

This includes £300 million of new grant funding for social care and the ability for councils to levy a 3 per cent adult social care precept. This funding is on top of the £1 billion Social Care grant announced last year which is being maintained in line with the manifesto commitment.

In addition, we expect to provide councils with estimated funding of around £3 billion in 2021/22 to help manage the impact of COVID-19 across their services, including in adult social care, and to compensate for income losses.

This funding will support local authorities to maintain care services while keeping up with rising demand and recovering from the impact of COVID-19.

In the longer term, the Government is committed to sustainable improvement of the adult social care system and will bring forward proposals this year.

**We are concerned that the Government's own pandemic planning had identified that social care would need significant support during the outbreak of a disease like COVID-19, yet social care was the poor relation to the NHS when it came to funding. In reviewing its pandemic planning processes the Government should explain how it will ensure that the social care sector receives adequate funding,**

**resources and support while COVID-19 continues, and in any future pandemic.  
(Paragraph 105)**

Government response

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government carried out extensive pandemic planning for Influenza. This UK-wide strategy set out the steps needed to respond to pandemic influenza, which included a focus on the resilience and support of health and social care workers.

In 2016, the Government carried out Exercise Cygnus to test the UK's response to a serious influenza pandemic. The aim of the exercise was to test systems to the extreme, to identify strengths and weaknesses in the UK's response plans, which would then inform improvements in our resilience. Following Exercise Cygnus, the Department recognised that further development of our pandemic response capability in three areas, including Adult Social Care was required.

The department commissioned further work on pandemic influenza preparedness from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services. This was completed in the spring of 2018 and included advice and guidance on planning for a pandemic, which was circulated to Directors of Adult Social Services.

Whilst the findings of Exercise Cygnus informed some of the Government's COVID-19 response, it is important to note that there are still distinct differences between the COVID-19 pandemic and pandemic influenza. Therefore, not all recommendations were applied to the COVID-19 response.

It is important - as with any civil emergency, that the Government now takes stock, reflects and analyses the lessons learned from the current pandemic. An important element of this process will be a commitment to review the approach to Social Care.

**COVID-19 has demonstrated that certain key public service functions are best delivered locally. These include the pandemic response of public health systems, the recruitment of volunteers and contact-tracing. To increase the resilience of public services in any future health crises, the Government must give more decision-making responsibility to its partners at the local level.  
(Paragraph 117)**

**It is clear that the underfunding of local services in recent years left them ill-equipped to deal with the resource pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic. For too long Government has prioritised services delivered from the centre, when many of the services that people use every day are organised at local level. The pandemic offers an opportunity to rethink how central Government funds and supports local services. (Paragraph 127)**

**The pandemic has demonstrated the need for local authorities, health care, social care and other service providers to operate as integrated components of local systems. Given the hurdles to public service delivery that COVID-19 has revealed, service providers should give careful consideration to which services are best coordinated at national level, and which services should be coordinated at local level. (Paragraph 139)**

#### Government response

We recognise the importance of public services working together to provide an integrated approach and this informs our policies and programmes.

For example, the Troubled Families Programme, which is delivered by local authorities and their partners – including children’s services, housing, police, health organisations, schools, Jobcentre Plus, voluntary and community services, and others - provides early, effective and joined up support from the right services to vulnerable families. For many families, Covid-19 has brought additional pressures and exacerbated existing problems such as financial issues, unemployment, domestic abuse and mental health, all of which are key issues for the programme.

At the Spending Review 2020, the Chancellor announced the extension of this work, making up to £165 million available for the programme in 2021- 22. Next year’s programme will continue to drive system change, both locally and nationally, and provide effective, co-ordinated support to disadvantaged families.

On 10 December the Government announced £46m from the Shared Outcomes Fund for a new programme - Changing Futures: changing systems to support adults experiencing multiple disadvantage. The programme will work in partnership with up to 15 local areas to test innovative approaches and improve outcomes for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. The prospectus invites expressions of interest from pioneering local partnerships who want to work with government to drive lasting system change and better outcomes for adults experiencing multiple disadvantage. By working together in local areas and across government, the programme aims to change systems; change services and change the futures of the most disadvantaged adults in our community.

We are evaluating how Government can be more joined up for local government. The recent Spending Review outlines Government’s ‘Focus on Outcomes’ (Section 4.21) and as part of this HM Treasury has been driving a X-Whitehall approach on outcomes, and evidencing impact and public value. A focus on outcomes is based on Sir Michael Barber’s Report (2017) and the Public Value Framework. Provisional outcomes and metrics were published for all UK government departments in December [here](#).

**The Government should set out in the white papers on English devolution and social care how it will ensure that local areas have the means and autonomy to develop a place-based approach to delivering public services. This should be the default approach to reform of public services, rather than the current tendency to drive change from the centre. (Paragraph 140)**

Government response

The Government intends to bring forward the English Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper in due course, building on the success of the directly elected Combined Authority Mayors and regional partnerships like the Midlands Engine and Northern Powerhouse.

There has been heightened engagement between central and local government, and between national and local services, throughout the response to the crisis. MCHLG has engaged with the local tier as a way of testing, communicating and monitoring public service interventions in response to Covid-19, and as a way of ensuring local partners have a voice in the design of interventions led by other government departments.

A new £5.0 million Shared Outcomes Fund project will test a new place-based model of policy design and delivery which drives greater cross-Whitehall coordination.

**The Government should set out in the white paper on English devolution how the tension between the NHS as a national service provider and the aims of the Government’s devolution agenda—which seeks to give more autonomy to local areas—may be reconciled. It should explain how the NHS will work with local authorities to ensure that the strategy for service integration laid out in the NHS Long-Term Plan aligns with place-based plans for integration in local areas. (Paragraph 141)**

Government response

The Government intends to bring forward the English Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper in due course, building on the success of the directly elected Combined Authority Mayors and regional partnerships like the Midlands Engine and Northern Powerhouse.

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A new £5.0 million Shared Outcomes Fund project will test a new place-based model of policy design and delivery which drives greater cross-Whitehall coordination.

**Community groups and volunteers have played an invaluable role during the COVID-19 pandemic in forming a bridge between public services and ‘hard-to-reach’ individuals. There are now over 4,000 COVID-19 mutual aid groups supporting vulnerable people across the country. When commissioning public services in future, commissioners should recognise the valuable experience of service delivery gained by the third sector during the pandemic. (Paragraph 146)**

#### Government response

Government recognises the valuable experience of public service delivery gained by Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations during the pandemic. This is in part why the new social value model that comes into effect on 1 January 2021 supports VCSEs to lead or be part of government supply chains.

Putting social value at the heart of service delivery is the next step in our journey of transforming how government delivers smarter, more thoughtful and effective public services. Public services designed in cooperation with communities, and delivered by a skilled and motivated workforce within diverse, innovative and resilient supply chains, will be better suited to the citizens they serve.

**Areas where local authorities had built strong links with community organisations before the pandemic were able to harness the surge in civic action. Local charities and established voluntary and community organisations were better placed than centralised national bodies and charities to coordinate volunteers. (Paragraph 147)**

#### Government response

Local authorities, in partnership with local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, are recruiting and coordinating volunteers at a local level. DCMS’ approach has been to empower these local efforts - for example, through our £750m funding package for frontline charities, including £310 million to support smaller, local charities working with vulnerable people in England. We have wanted to ensure that national efforts to encourage volunteering do not detract from the locally-led response.

Public services have utilised informal community action to deliver support to vulnerable people. In a recent New Local Government Network survey, local authorities indicated that the COVID Mutual Aid Groups (MAGs) have been a significant part of their response. The study also pointed to the prevalence of MAGs in areas with high social capital, which often correlated with areas of affluence. Moreover, MAGs were more likely to function well in those same areas. Left behind neighbourhoods, on the other hand, tend to lack the prerequisites that help connect communities together, especially as they often receive less funding and investment.

Central government has an important role to play by working with the sector through bodies such as the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership (the VCSEP). The VCSEP is a collection of voluntary and community sector organisations, and is co-chaired by the British Red Cross and NAVCA. The Partnership aims to help people prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. They do this through coordinating and directly providing support to those in need. Government provided a grant of £4.8 million to support this work during COVID-19, and prepare for future emergencies.

This funding is being used to improve coordination across the voluntary and community sector through:

- a network of regional hubs to provide additional capacity to the VCS when demand outstrips supply at a local level;
- a national cell to match and coordinate demand for volunteers across the country, and;
- capturing unmet need across the UK and informing a more effective response to emergencies.

Working with and through bodies such as the VCSEP enables central government to complement, and not detract from, the important local efforts responding to this crisis.

**The Government should set out in the white paper on English devolution how it will empower local NHS providers, councils, and other local public service providers to draw up agreed measurable outcomes for their area. It should delineate how regulators will work with local areas to agree such outcomes and hold individual service providers accountable for partnership working. The outcomes should reflect the specific needs and priorities of local areas. (Paragraph 153)**

#### Government response

The Government intends to bring forward the English Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper in due course, building on the success of the directly elected Combined Authority Mayors and regional partnerships like the Midlands Engine and Northern Powerhouse.

The recent Spending Review outlines Government's 'Focus on Outcomes' (Section 4.21) and as part of this HM Treasury has been driving a cross-Whitehall approach on outcomes, and evidencing impact and public value.

**COVID-19 has shown that the Government and other service providers need to rethink their approach to data-sharing. There has been too much reluctance**

**from the centre to share data with organisations at the local level which are responsible for public services, hindering the efficient delivery of quality, person-centred services. (Paragraph 158)**

**We recommend that the Government and national public services review their systems for sharing data with local services. Unless they have access to the information that they need, public services will be unable to meet the challenges posed by winter 2020/21 and the second England-wide lockdown. (Paragraph 159)**

#### Government response

The government recognises that there is untapped potential in the way the government and local authorities use data. A key objective under our National Data Strategy is transforming how the government uses data to drive efficiency and improve public services.

The true value of data can only be fully realised when it is fit for purpose, recorded in standardised formats on modern, future-proof systems and held in a way that means it is findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable. There are long-term and systemic barriers we need to address, including a lack of consistency in the standards and systems used across the government, making it hard to share data efficiently.

To address these challenges the Cabinet Office has appointed Paul Willmott as Government Chief Digital Officer. He leads the Digital, Data and Technology Function and Profession and the next phase of digital transformation across government, of which government's use and sharing of data will be a key and integral workstream. His role will focus on transforming how data is collected, managed, used and shared across government, including with the wider public sector, and create joined-up and interoperable data infrastructure. He is working to also ensure the right skills and leadership are in place to understand and unlock the potential of data – and that organisations are both incentivised to do the right thing, whilst being supported by the right controls to drive standardisation, consistency and appropriate data use.

**Local areas should have the means and autonomy to maintain the data sharing innovations developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government should set out in the white paper on English devolution how it will support local areas and city regions to adopt new data standards, and how it will invest in common approaches and tools for information governance. (Paragraph 165)**

#### Government response

The government recognises that data standards and common approaches for information governance are crucial for improving data sharing and the Government has been making progress in this area. The Data Standards Authority (DSA) was established in April 2020 to improve the public sector's management of data. The DSA

is a multi-disciplinary team drawn from a variety of data-related backgrounds in technology, strategy and policy. Working with experts across the public sector and devolved administrations, the private sector and academia, the DSA identifies, improves and helps implement data standards that meet user needs. The DSA is working with representatives from local government, such as iStandUK, on a number of use cases where data standards can be set for common adoption.

The National Data Strategy published in September 2020 sets out a wider programme of change to improve government data to drive efficiency and improve public services. We are committed to transforming the way data is collected, managed, used and shared across government, including with the wider public sector, and creating joined-up and interoperable data infrastructure.

The Government intends to bring forward the English Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper in due course.

**We are concerned that agencies do not share the data that they need to support vulnerable children and to determine which children need their help. The Government should issue new guidance on data-sharing powers and duties to protect vulnerable children, and, if necessary, introduce legislation to ensure that such data is shared. (Paragraph 168)**

#### Government response

Safeguarding partners - health, police and local authority - are under a shared and equal duty to make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in a local area. The pandemic has shown the importance of strong local partnership working, especially in looking after our most vulnerable children. The new multi-agency safeguarding partner arrangements have been put to the test, but the pandemic has demonstrated some great examples of collaboration and cooperation.

For example, a key element of the local response to the pandemic has been local Covid response teams using shared datasets to identify vulnerable children and provide them with the necessary support. In the Bradford Opportunity Area, children were provided with glasses with the aim of improving literacy rates after linked education and health data identified 2,500 children who failed an eye test but did not have glasses. Similarly, a pilot using the linked education and health data demonstrated a link between very low early years attainment and undiagnosed neurodiversity disabilities which has enabled support to be provided earlier.

At the Prime Minister's Hidden Harms Virtual Summit on 21 May 2020, charities, social workers and representatives from children's services came together at the Safeguarding session to support children and families most in need, especially in the difficult operating context created by the pandemic. This is part of our ongoing

response to the pandemic, recognising the continuing high numbers of children and young people asking for help and support. We continue to work closely with schools and local authorities to understand the pressures on the sector and keep future needs under review.

The Government is also supporting local areas to improve their use of data to help vulnerable children and families via a £9.6 million Shared Outcomes Fund programme announced at the Spending Review. As part of this work, MHCLG plans to support local authorities develop new and innovative ways to use data to support vulnerable children and families; further details will be announced in due course.

DfE, HO and DHSC commissioned NHS Digital to undertake user research to understand the barriers to sharing information about vulnerable children, between safeguarding professionals across social care, health, policing and education. There were a number of recommendations to improve practices, from information sharing platforms to guidance and training requirements. To address these, there are plans in place to revise the non-statutory Information Sharing Guidance: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers by Spring 2021. This will clarify that practitioners do not need consent when sharing information for the purposes of safeguarding (in light of GDPR/DPA 2018) and will introduce a practice toolkit.

The Child Protection Information Sharing system (CP-IS), led by NHS Digital, provides vital intelligence across agencies which help practitioners make decisions to keep children safe. It allows social workers and health professionals to share information when a child known to Social Services attends an unscheduled health setting, such as A&E. As of November, the majority of Local Authorities (98%) and in-scope unscheduled health care settings (99%) are now live on the system, with the outstanding Local Authorities expected to be live by Spring 2021.

**While some local areas were able to innovate and share data in new ways during the pandemic, many public service leaders lack the confidence and understanding of existing data protection legislation to share information about individual service users with system partners. Such reluctance can limit the ability of public services to keep people safe, particularly during national crises. (Paragraph 173)**

**The Government, while recognising the need to protect personal data, should work with the Information Commissioner to build on the innovation in data sharing seen in some local areas and to better understand the structural, legal and cultural impediments to data-sharing during the pandemic. Once the forthcoming statutory code on data-sharing is published, the Government and Information Commissioner should release updated guidance on how any such impediments should be addressed. (Paragraph 174)**

## Government response

The government departments, Local Authorities and private bodies have worked together throughout the pandemic. Such initiatives have ensured, for example, that data can be shared to support contact tracing initiatives and/or to ensure that vulnerable people can access food supplies and other essential services. In general the data protection legislation has not posed a barrier to data-sharing which is necessary and proportionate for the purposes of protecting public health. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has issued user-friendly guidance on its website to support organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic and produced more specific advice for health and social care organisations, employers conducting workplace testing and for businesses collecting personal data for contact tracing.

The government recognises that perceived barriers to data-sharing can sometimes be more restrictive than any actual legal barriers. We will continue to work closely with the ICO to counter myths and promote responsible data-sharing, including through implementation of the National Data Strategy. The Strategy recognised that real and perceived legal and security risks of sharing data; a lack of incentives, skills or investment to implement effective governance; and a lack of consistency in the standards and systems used across the government and other public bodies could all play their part in inhibiting effective data sharing and set out the government's commitment to drive change in this area.

The Government is leading on a number of initiatives to address impediments for data-sharing including:

- Providing a legal gateway to speed up and simplify the process of public sector data sharing through the Digital Economy Act 2017. We have reconvened the Public Service Delivery Review Board established under the Digital Economy Act 2017 to review any proposed new public sector delivery objectives before making a recommendation to the Cabinet Officer Minister to introduce new data sharing regulations.
- Triaging pressing data sharing cases and looking at common blockers preventing data sharing through The Data Sharing Playbook.
- Setting and driving the adoption of standards via the Data Standards Authority to improve the public sector's management of data. Creating greater consistency, integrity and interoperability will enable data to be reused and shared more effectively.
- Working on improving data quality through the Data Quality Hub and the recently published Data Quality Framework.

**The Government should recognise that investing in prevention and early intervention can reduce the pressures placed on the NHS and the justice system, and that supporting children to avoid poor life outcomes brings financial savings and economic benefits. A future inquiry might investigate further a preventative approach to public services. (Paragraph 52)**

**The use of data was a critical factor in determining citizens' experience of public services during the pandemic, and particularly for vulnerable people. The role of data in the delivery of public services will grow in prominence in the months and years ahead, as new digital technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) become more readily available to public service providers. A future inquiry may investigate data-sharing in public services more closely. (Paragraph 175)**

#### Government response

As the Committee recognises, the Government has always been clear that there will be opportunities to look back, analyse and reflect on all aspects of COVID-19. As the Prime Minister has said, this will include an independent inquiry at the appropriate time.

The Government is grateful for the Committee's recommendation. We will consider this and other recommendations which touch on the scope and remit of the independent inquiry at the right time for decisions as to the inquiry's terms of reference to be made.

**The Cabinet Office showed admirable flexibility during the pandemic in issuing new guidance to commissioners which put greater emphasis on the social value that commissioning can create and gave greater autonomy to frontline service providers. (Paragraph 186)**

**The Cabinet Office should now update The Outsourcing Playbook to reflect the new ways in which businesses and charities delivered services during the pandemic, and provide commissioners with best-practice guidance to encourage joint working with the private and third sector. Any new guidance for commissioners must retain the existing focus on social value, partnership working and sustainable grant funding. (Paragraph 187)**

**Once updated, The outsourcing playbook should be incorporated into the forthcoming green paper on procurement. Its guidance should apply across the public sector to ensure that public service commissioners prioritise social value when contracting services from charities and businesses. (Paragraph 188)**

The Cabinet Office has published Procurement Policy Note PPN 06/20 setting out how the Ministerial commitment to expand government's use of the Social Value Act will be delivered. Also provided is extensive guidance that is available to suppliers too, for

full transparency. Training for commercial and procurement teams is underway, with over 1100 commercial professionals having attended detailed training on how to maximise social value opportunities.

The Cabinet Office agrees with the Committee's recommendation and is developing version 3 of the Outsourcing Playbook to achieve this. This will follow the same collaborative process as the previous version including input from businesses and charities, and draw on lessons learnt from commissioning during the pandemic. We plan to launch the updated Outsourcing Playbook in 2021.

The Green Paper: Transforming Public Procurement, published in December 2020 links to both the Outsourcing Playbook and the Construction Playbook, and provides the list of the requirements detailed in those documents. The Green Paper also explains that the Construction Playbook sets out best practice for contracting authorities, including policies to support innovation in construction such as setting clear and appropriate outcome-based specifications that are designed with the input of industry and early supply chain involvement.

**There is a clear requirement for central Government and local services to evaluate the performance of services that moved online during the first lockdown, ensuring that public services maintain face-to-face services wherever they are needed. They should work closely with service users in conducting this evaluation, because users are best placed to advise on which services should be delivered online, by telephone, or in person. (Paragraph 200)**

#### Government response

We recognise the expectation for quality online public services. In response to this since the first lockdown, the Government Digital Service has assured around 150 digital services. These have been a mixture of legacy services improved or scaled up in response to the context, or completely new COVID-19 digital services. All services were assessed using a minimum of a peer review against the government Service Standard before being made available online. The requirement to understand user needs was a key part of the assessment which covered the channels necessary for the service to operate, be it a service which was online, by telephone, in person or a combination of those. This ensured they were resilient, accessible and secure. As part of the assurance was a condition that services which do not meet the full expectations of the service standard, were revisited within 6 weeks of the first assessment to meet the full expectations or be retired. The Government Digital Service's remit for assurance is for central government departments and does not cover local government.

The Service Standard is published on GOV.UK along with the Technology Code of Practice which is the cross-government agreed standard for the [spend controls process](#). They specify the need for service user engagement when creating, buying or

running public services online and when buying or building technology. 239 local authorities, including some combined local authorities, have signed the Local Digital Declaration. Part of this declaration includes that they commit to following these standards and guidance when developing digital services or buying or building technology.

**Central Government and local services should build on the advances made during the pandemic by prioritising funding for public sector digital services. The Government should put a particular focus on improving the digital skills of the public service workforce, and improving digital access and skills for those parts of the population that are at risk of digital exclusion. (Paragraph 201)**

#### Government response

We support the view that digital skills in the public service are crucial for delivering good public sector digital services and are addressing this by providing and improving the training available to public servants.

The Government Digital Service Academy trains staff across the public sector in areas such as digital leadership, assessments and standards. These modules support the government to design industry-leading services and develop digital maturity. Since the Academy was established in 2014, over 12,000 students from across the public sector including local government have received training. Whilst the Government Digital Service ceased all classroom based learning as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Academy continues to deliver online learning for those new to the Digital, Data and Technology function across the public sector. The Academy also continues to deliver the SCS Digital Leadership Course aimed at senior civil servants in central government who need to support digital transformation and oversee joined-up trusted services which respond to user needs.

Additionally, the No10 Data Science team has recently launched a pilot Data Masterclass for Senior Leaders to upskill 1,000 senior civil servants across the public sector.

The Digital, Data and Technology Faststream programme is also undergoing transformation to ensure a stronger and more diverse pipeline of talent across central government.

We recognise the need to improve digital access and skills for citizens so people can access public services. To improve digital access, the Government Digital Service in Cabinet Office provides guidance and training on accessibility to Government departments and the wider public sector. The Government Digital Service also has an accessibility monitoring team. This team monitors public sector websites for accessibility and will be reporting these results as required in the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018, to ensure that

products and services meet accessibility standards. Following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union in the transition period after 31 December 2020, the Government Digital Service plans to remove the Regulations requirement to report the monitoring findings by the end of 2021 to the EU.

DCMS launched the Digital Skills Partnership (DSP) in 2017 to bring together organisations from across the public, private, and third sector to improve digital skills and capability levels across the skills spectrum.

In addition to the national board, Local Digital Skills Partnerships (Local DSPs) have been set up in seven trailblazer regions (Lancashire, Heart of the South West (Devon/Somerset), West Midlands, Cornwall, Isles of Scilly, Cheshire & Warrington, the South East and West Yorkshire) to bring together cross-sector regional and national partners to work collaboratively to upskill the current workforce, advance digital inclusion, and build thriving regional economies

Local DSPs have been playing an important role in the response to Covid-19, collaborating with local organisations and national partners to help individuals and businesses build digital skills and resilience, and support regional economic recovery. They have been working closely with Growth Hubs and schools to understand the challenges businesses and individuals are facing and to collate useful resources to support people around digital during this time.

In response to Covid-19, the Government and Ofcom agreed a set of commitments with the UK's major broadband and mobile operators to support vulnerable consumers during the pandemic. Providers committed to working with customers who are finding it difficult to pay their bill as a result of Covid-19 to ensure that they were treated fairly and appropriately supported, in addition to providing new and generous landline and mobile offers, such as free or low cost mobile data boosts. Furthermore, a number of websites, including the NHS and victims of crime websites have been zero-rated. Ofcom has recently published a vulnerability guide for providers, setting out their expectations and good practice on how vulnerable telecoms consumers should be supported. This includes treating those in financial distress fairly, providing them with payment support options, such as payment holidays, and only disconnecting consumers as a last resort option.

**In recent months, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office have argued that the pandemic offers a chance for fundamental public service reform. Furthermore, the Prime Minister has promised an independent inquiry to learn lessons from COVID-19. (Paragraph 210)**

**Because the Government did not give oral evidence to the inquiry, and its**

**offer to send written evidence arrived too late, we were unable to discuss how it intends to learn lessons from the pandemic in the forthcoming public inquiry and the approach that it will take to public service reform. We therefore call on the Government to carry out:**

- (1) a rapid evaluation of what worked well and what worked badly in public service delivery during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that services quickly learn lessons. The Government should carry out this evaluation within the next six months;**
- (2) an assessment of the changes seen in public service delivery during the first lockdown, to embed the innovations that worked well. To ensure that positive changes are not lost, the Government should publish its findings within a year;**
- (3) a long-term evaluation of the fundamental weaknesses in public services that have been revealed by the pandemic, to inform a major project of public service transformation. (Paragraph 211)**

#### Government response

The Government is grateful for the Committee's careful consideration of some of the range of complex issues involved in determining the eventual terms of reference of the independent inquiry. We will consider recommendations which touch on the inquiry's remit and scope at the right time for those decisions to be made. When decisions are made on these matters, Parliament will of course be informed in the usual way.