



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Kemi Badenoch MP

Minister of State for Equalities and Levelling Up Communities
4th Floor, Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF



Will Quince MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families
Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Maggie Throup MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Vaccines and Public Health
39 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0EU

3 November 2021

Dear The Rt Hon. the Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top,

Thank you for writing to us and for the Committee's continued consideration of the important role of public services in addressing child vulnerability. We apologise for the delay in responding. The inquiry you are leading will provide valuable evidence on how services currently work in practice and where there may be gaps or a lack of join up in public services to support the most vulnerable.

We want to reassure you that providing effective support for vulnerable children and young people is a priority for Government. Together, we have delivered a co-ordinated cross-government response to support the most vulnerable during the pandemic and we have built on this approach at the recent Spending Review. Our departments recognise the challenges you identify around child vulnerability and the importance of a joined-up approach in responding to these. As we build back better after the Covid pandemic, it is crucial that these children and young people get the support they need to thrive, and the Spending Review set out significant investment to support children and their families.

Early intervention and support for families

We recognise the importance of prioritising early intervention to support families and ensure vulnerable children are safeguarded and protected and their outcomes improved. As you have highlighted, one way we do this is through the Supporting Families programme which drives services to work together to ensure families get access to the vital, early and coordinated support they need to overcome multiple and complex problems before they escalate. The £200m expansion of the cross-government Supporting Families programme will see the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department for Education (DfE) working closely together to deliver on our manifesto commitment to serve vulnerable families with the intensive, integrated support they need to care for their children – from the early years and throughout their lives. This

further investment in the Supporting Families programme will enable local authorities and their partners to target investment at those most in need and secure better outcomes for up to an additional 300,000 families across all aspects of their lives. This programme works in parallel with community health services, including midwifery and health visiting and with DWP's *Reducing Parental Conflict* Programme which trains practitioners to spot levels of conflict harmful to children and support parents to address them.

As you identify in your letter, family hubs are another important part of our approach to early intervention. Family hubs are a way of joining up locally to improve access to services, the connections between families, professionals, services, and providers, and put relationships at the heart of family help. Family hubs bring together services for children of all ages, with a great Start for Life offer at their core. At Budget 2021, the Government announced a £300 million investment to transform 'Start for Life' services and create a network of family hubs in half of the council areas across England. This delivers on Dame Andrea Leadsom's 'Best Start for Life' review, and on our manifesto commitment to champion family hubs. This will provide thousands of families with access to support when they need it, giving babies the best start in life – supporting them to thrive and realise their potential. The package includes £82m over three years to support 75 areas to create a network of family hubs. This significant new investment builds on the Government's existing £34m programme to champion family hubs.

Across government, we are also investing to tackle serious violence. We are introducing a new duty to ensure agencies work together to reduce serious violence, funding Violence Reduction Units in key areas, and conducting research into the effectiveness of multi-agency partnerships on addressing county lines and serious violence. From early 2022, DfE will establish SAFE taskforces in mainstream schools in 10 serious violence hotspots to identify those at risk of involvement in serious violence and support them to engage with education. This complements the pilots of Alternative Provision (AP) Specialist Taskforces that will test, from November, the impact of co-locating specialists drawn from across health, education, social care, youth services and youth justice to support pupils in AP.

Data-sharing

Government continues to actively support work to improve data sharing. We know that sharing information between professionals at the right time is crucial to ensuring children are protected and supported to thrive. Removing barriers to the sharing of data to ensure our most vulnerable receive a continuity of care and provision is a priority for all of us. This has been critical throughout the pandemic during which data-sharing has accelerated thanks to the willingness of care, health and other professionals to work together and overcome barriers. Government supported these efforts by establishing the Data Standards Authority (DSA) in April 2020 and providing clear guidance on sharing confidential data so that frontline practitioners know and are confident in their knowledge of the duties and powers they have to share data.

In practice, this has included rolling out Phase 1 of the Child Protection Information Sharing System (CP-IS) to allow seamless sharing of information between social care and health. Data sharing is also a targeted focus of the Supporting Families programme to incentivise local authorities and their partners to share data to better identify and support eligible families. In addition, the Family Hubs – Growing Up Well project is partnering with councils in Bristol, Lancashire, Salford, Suffolk, and Tower Hamlets, to develop data and

digital solutions to improve how professionals across education, health and social care collaborate and plan with families, with a focus on information sharing and the user experience of families accessing services.

At the national level, DfE, Home Office and DHSC have collaborated on several projects to improve multi-agency information sharing between safeguarding practitioners including planning revisions to non-statutory guidance. Furthermore, the Local Data Accelerator Fund (DAF) is part of the Data Improvement Across Government programme (DIAG) and is another example of our commitment to improving data sharing. DAF is a new £7.9m fund to support data projects that improve services for children and families. We have recently announced that 10 local authorities and their partners will be supported by this fund.

Independent Review of Children’s Social Care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Review

As you know, there are two cross-government reviews underway which will make recommendations to transform the systems that identify and support the most vulnerable children. The SEND Review is looking at how to improve the outcomes and experiences of children with SEND, alongside delivering long-term financial sustainability for the high needs budget. The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, led by Josh MacAlister, published its Case for Change on 17 June. This set out the evidence the review has gathered so far – including the importance of family help – and its initial take on overarching challenges. We look forward to receiving the recommendations from both reviews and working together in the coming months to improve how vulnerable children and their families are supported.

We want to re-emphasise our commitment to delivering support to address and respond to the complex needs that our most vulnerable children and families can face. We are committed to building on the collaborative approach that was bolstered during the pandemic.

With very best wishes,



Kemi Badenoch MP

**Minister of State for Equalities and
Levelling Up Communities**



Will Quince MP

**Parliamentary Under-Secretary of
State for Children and Families**



Maggie Throup MP

**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
for Vaccines and Public Health**

