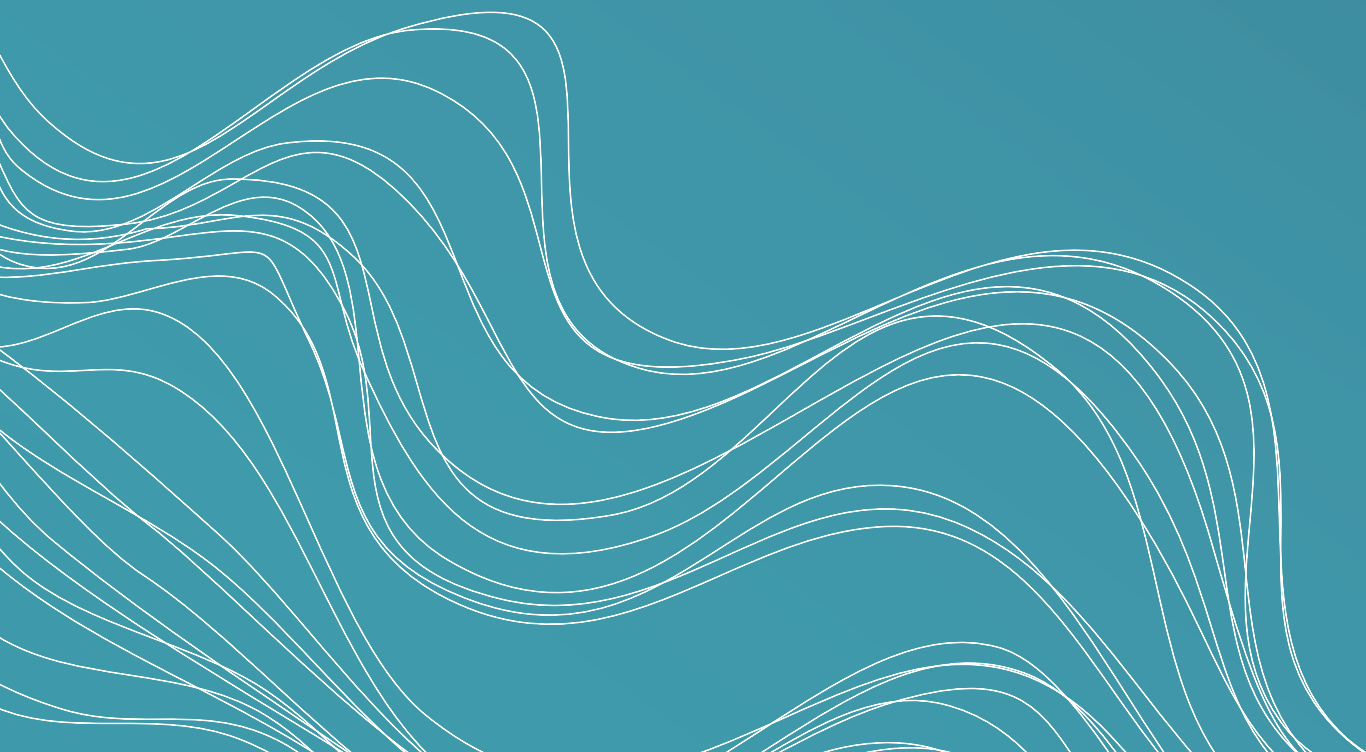




Vulnerable Children and Young People Consultation Guide

Helping you to respond to the current public consultation on vulnerable children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic period.



Right now there is a public consultation on a plan to address the impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable children and young people. The consultation is open until 13 November and we are encouraging you to respond.

The Covid-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan

is being developed on a cross department basis, led by the Department of Health and including DfC, DE, DOJ and DfE. The plan is intended to reflect a series of activities that will be, or have been, undertaken across government in response to the challenges and risks faced by vulnerable children and young people. The plan will help support the next steps in rebuilding services to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people.

The plan is concerned with a broad definition of vulnerable children and young people such as young carers, children with disabilities, children with mental health issues, children who access social services, looked after children and refugees. You can read the full definition of vulnerable children and young people in the introduction to the plan.

There are four main objectives which form the structure of the plan. The aim is to:

1. Promote safety and well-being in the home environment.
2. Promote safety and well-being in the wider community.
3. Strengthen the system capacity to respond to current risks.
4. Rebuild services.

The Department welcomes response to the plan from any individual, professional or organisation who engages with vulnerable children and young people throughout Northern Ireland and who can share their experience, expertise and best practice examples to inform the decision-making process.

We would like to encourage any Christian individual, organisation or professional who engages with vulnerable children and/or young people across Northern Ireland to respond to this consultation and to use their experience and expertise to influence government decision making in how to help and support vulnerable children, young people and their families.

This consultation will be of special interest to parents or carers of vulnerable children and young people; professionals such as social workers, teachers or counsellors; and to Christian organisations engaging with vulnerable children in local communities.

Throughout scripture we see the love and value God places on children and those who are vulnerable. We see His concern for the orphan, particularly vulnerable children. In the Old Testament, we see the potential and influence that God sees in young people through the story of King Josiah who, at only 8 years old, established positive religious reform in Israel. In the New Testament we read Jesus' words affirming children in Mark 10:13, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." We can clearly see God's heart for children and young people throughout scripture, and as faithful followers we pursue this same heart.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many vulnerable children, young adults and their families are experiencing great distress and this plan offers an opportunity to create better systems of support during the present challenges that they face. Your response to this consultation could make a positive difference.

The Consultation opened on 18th September 2020 and will close on 13th November 2020 at 23.59. You can easily respond online through the [online survey](#).

The Consultation on the plan is relatively straightforward. It is split into 6 distinct parts and each part has a number of questions:

Introduction

- Includes 6 questions.
- Q1-4 ask for personal details.
- Q5 asks if you agree with the definition of vulnerable children and young people. Can you identify any group of vulnerable children not mentioned that you would want to see included in the plan?
- Q6 asks if you agree with the objectives of the plan. Can you identify any gaps in the objectives that do not meet the needs of the children, young people or families you work with?

Section 1 - within the home environment

Section 2 - within the wider community

Section 3 - strengthen system capacity

These 3 sections of the consultation will follow a simple pattern of 3 questions in each section relating to the objectives in the plan. The 3 questions ask:

- Do you agree that the right actions have been included in the section?
- Are there any needs that are not being addressed through the actions in this section?
- Are you aware of any examples of best practice that are addressing need in this area?

This is your opportunity to agree or disagree with the actions, flag up any gaps that you can identify and offer your stories of examples of what is working well in your experience.

Section 4-rebuild services

This section offers the opportunity to share any further ideas you have or insight you can offer for future planning.

- Q 16 is concerned with restarting services.
- Q17 is concerned with safeguarding children and young people in the event of a further surge, which is the situation we are in now.

Summing up

If you have anything further to add this is the time to share it.

Q18 asks for any sources of evidence that would be useful to the Executive. If you have any research, statistics or facts it would be good to include that here.

- Q19 asks for any further comments. If you have any issues specific to your organisation you can address them here.

In Summary

As you respond to this consultation, we encourage you to follow these simple steps:-

Pray

Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you with compassion for the vulnerable children and young people that this plan is designed to support. Pray for wisdom for the Executive and Department Ministers as they make difficult decisions for the days ahead. Pray that God will equip you to bring insight to this consultation and help you to clearly express your ideas and concerns.

Understand

To understand the issue, read [the consultation document](#) and make yourself familiar with the definition of vulnerable children and young people, the 4 objectives and the actions within each objective. It would be a good idea to have the document open for easy reference while you go through the consultation [online survey](#).

Work through the questions with your experience in mind

The consultation consists of 19 short questions that either require a yes/no answer or a written response. The language is not difficult to understand and the motivation for engagement seems genuine and open. The Executive would like to hear your experiences, stories, expertise, examples, facts and statistics in your own words. Try to answer clearly and succinctly and obviously do not include personal names or details in any stories shared.

Remember, the consultation closes on **13th November 2020** at 23.59 and you can access the online survey [here](#).

Thank you for taking the time to consider responding to this consultation for and with vulnerable children and young people.