

# Experiences of children and young people in the **COVID-19** pandemic

# 1.0 Executive summary

The Covid-19 pandemic had an immediate impact on the daily lives of children and young people. While children and young people are known to be at far less a risk from Covid-19 than adults, the secondary impacts of the pandemic are severe. The repeated closure of schools and other education settings, lockdown and social restrictions and the suspension of vital support and leisure services affected all children.

It is widely discussed that the pandemic has exposed and amplified the existing inequality felt by individuals and groups from different walks of life. The same applies to children and young people, who have had a varied experience of the pandemic, largely based on factors such as income, family life, education, geography, family, health and mental health.

It is understood that the pandemic will continue to have lasting effects on the lives of children and young people in the years to come, so it is vital that future service planning and the 'building back better' narrative includes insight from children and young people who are best placed to say how this can be achieved. This is why the Inequalities Reference Groups have defined the experiences of children and young people as an area for focus. The remit of IRG is to reduce inequality in Tameside & Glossop and make recommendations on how to do so.

This report will draw upon research and engagement with children and young people on a local, regional and national level to demonstrate how the pandemic has shaped their lives and make recommendations on how to tackle the inequality they face. Vital for bringing about this change is to ensure that the voice of a diverse range of children and young people is heard.

The purpose of this area of focus is to:

- Better understand the issues faced by young people in light of Covid-19
- Ensure a wide cross section of young people are engaged
- Make recommendations on how to build back fairer for this group affected by Covid-19

The focus of this piece of work will be hearing and understanding the voices of young people, particularly in relation to the impact of Covid-19. For the purposes of this work young people includes those up to the age of 25.

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## 2.0 Context

The national restrictions that arose from the pandemic brought the daily lives of children and young people to an immediate halt. Most significantly, schools were closed for the majority of children and young people and socialising outside the household was prohibited, including all leisure and group activities. Equally, health and social care services became virtual or were suspended.

School closures since the beginning of the pandemic have had a major impact on schools and children, both those who have been in school and those learning remotely at home (NAO). Furthermore, there are concerns that the effects of isolation, social restrictions and reduced access to education and physical wellbeing will have a long-standing impact on the mental health of children and young people. On top of this, these challenges faced by children and young people have been felt disproportionately among those with existing disadvantages such as children facing poorer health, educational, economic and social outcomes compared to their more privileged peers.

Although social restrictions applied to all, the effects of the pandemic were not felt equally by all. Local, regional and national research has built a clear picture of the varied and complex ways in which children and young people's lives have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting restrictions. There are clear themes that arise when understanding the experiences young people since the pandemic:

- Poor mental health
- Missed education
- Inequality – different experiences faced by disadvantaged CYP
- Children with extreme vulnerability (asylum-seeking children and children in the criminal justice system)
- Digital exclusion
- Poor tailoring of information-sharing about Covid-19 to young people

Outlined below are the findings from local, regional and national research and engagement with children and young people, which will paint a picture of the experiences they had during the pandemic, and will inform the recommendations.

### Local engagement with children and young people

Engagement with children and young people in Tameside has been carried out to hear their experiences of the pandemic and their priorities for building back better:

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## 3.0 Partnership Engagement Network Engagement Session

In summer 2020, Tameside & Glossop Strategic Commission (Tameside Council and Tameside & Glossop Clinical Commissioning Group) engaged with residents, patients, service users and other stakeholders on the impacts of Covid-19 and their experiences during the pandemic in a number of ways to date. This included virtual engagement sessions with children and young people.

This session was designed to be a listening exercise to give those who attended a chance to talk about their experience of the pandemic and offer their perspective on how we can do things differently in the future.

The session was facilitated by Cllr Bill Fairfoull, Executive Deputy Leader of the Council, and Cllr Leanne Feeley, Executive Member for Lifelong Learning, Equalities, Culture & Heritage, as well as Karen Huntley, Lay Member for Public Participation, Tameside & Glossop CCG.

The discussions were captured for the purpose of providing evidence and insight to the development of public services in light of the pandemic. Some strong themes emerged during the session, including:

### Mental health

- Children with mental health difficulties that have come about as a result of the pandemic – they need to be supported and have support networks so that they know help is at hand. They haven't had the usual coping mechanisms – being with other people or having hobbies – to help them alleviate poor mental health.
- There are more children and young people experiencing poor mental health, including younger children.
- Support for young carers stopped during the pandemic where it would normally help them with issues such as mental health and it was difficult for them to stay in touch because of their caring responsibilities.

### Education

- Children and young people feel anxious about the future – many young people had their exams cancelled in the last academic year but are stressed about keeping up with their work for the next one.

### Digital exclusion

- Young people without internet access or access to a device struggle to do work or learning at home. It also makes it harder to catch up with studying for exams that were cancelled.
  - Not only this but not having internet makes it near impossible, especially for young people leaving care, to interact virtually with anyone
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## Relationships

- Children and young people experience difficulty in relationships with family and friends outside of their household, and no activities held during lockdown to make keeping these relationships strong easy.
- Difficulty of being unable to see close family members, particularly for those who are in care.
- Seeing family in person makes all the difference – video or phone calls aren't the same. Children and young people need face-to-face connections.
- The positives of lockdown – spending more time at home when you have access to a computer to get your work done has been good, as well as learning to bond and get along with siblings has been good.
- The pandemic has been strange – strange not to see friends and not going outside.
- Some children have been able to settle better with their foster carers due to spending time at home

## Other

- Young people will have gone through major life experiences or milestones while in lockdown but haven't had the interaction of friends or family to get them through it. Equally, other events such as prom have been taken away from them.
  - Children and young people have been largely left out of the decision-making process about where to go next from the pandemic
  - Young people tend to be scapegoated for spending time in public places when they shouldn't, but in reality there has been so little for them to do to relax and interact with people
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## 4.0 Children in Care Council & Care Leavers Survey

Similarly, engagement work around the impacts of Covid-19 on children and young people's lives took place via the Children in Care Council. Two surveys were shared with cared for children and young people, one for cared for children aged 8-16 and one for those leaving care, aged 16-25.

The questionnaires contained statements about mental wellbeing and how well children felt they had been supported during the first lockdown. The young people who responded were involved with either the safeguarding, Looked After or Leaving Care social work teams.

Children and young people were asked about their lockdown experiences, general wellbeing and their priorities or concerns for the future.

### The first survey was sent out to children aged 8-16 involved with the duty, safeguarding and Looked After Children teams. Key findings included:

- Over three quarters (77%) agreed that they were generally in a good mood.
- 91% said they had felt supported during the lockdown (none disagreed with this statement).
- 80% said that they felt like their rights were respected
- Over nine in ten (94%) felt they were able to share their worries or opinions.
- When asked what they worried about, children mostly indicated that the future and how their family and friends were doing were their main concerns.
- When asked what helped them during lockdown, it was family, friends, pets, activities and residential staff.
- Generally, children understood the changes and reasons why.
- When asked if there was anything they wished they could do but couldn't because of restrictions, children said seeing family and friends, social activities and holidays.

### The second survey was sent to young people involved with the Leaving Care team, aged 16- 25.

- Over a third (37%) said that generally they were in a good mood
  - Two-thirds said they felt supported during lockdown
  - 75% said they felt able to share their worries or opinions
  - When asked about what worried them, how their family were doing, the future, mental health and finances were the biggest issues for those who responded.
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## 5.0 Corporate Parenting Board

In the summer of 2020, poems, artwork and writing submitted by cared for children or their foster carers were presented at Corporate Parenting Board, to help them to understand children's experiences of the first lockdown.

Some of the work was submitted to Coram Voices 2020, a national writing competition for children in and leaving care. Images or copies of the work cannot be included in this report as names are shown. A summary of what was written by young people is as follows:

Children reflected on their experiences of the pandemic, including being unable to see their family and friends because of social restrictions. Their writing was very reflective – many poems talked about being grateful that they were alive, that they were cared for and that the professionals or carers in their lives made sure they were looked after. Some named the boss of their home (children's home) and were thankful that staff continually put themselves at risk to be there for them. Some children offered their perspective of being written to by the government being asked to shield, and how life and the country ground to a halt in an instant. Importantly children wanted to distinguish how their experience differed from that of other children who had not grown up in care. Some children talked about the difficulty of having parents who are ill – the biggest issue overall was family.

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## 6.0 Youth Summit

On 15 November 2021, the Tameside Youth Summit was held at Hyde Town Hall. Young people from a range of schools across the borough were invited to attend and take part in workshop discussions reflecting on their experiences of the pandemic.

The summit was organised by the Youth Service with the help of the Youth Council and was attended by both the Executive Leader and Chief Executive.

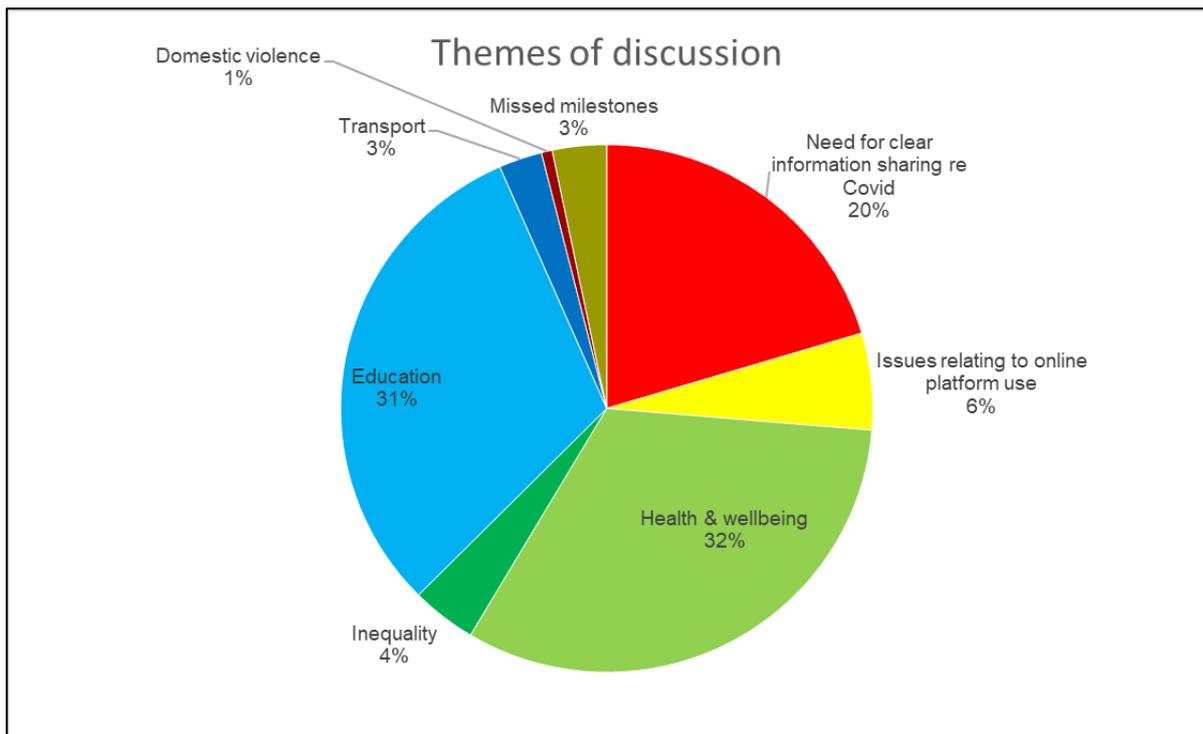
The workshop sessions were structured around two key questions:

1. What are the issues faced by young people as a result of the pandemic?
2. What are the solutions or changes you would like to see looking to the future?

Young people were asked to be 'brutally honest' in two rounds of workshops alongside local leaders, including heads of key services in the council and NHS, where they were invited to discuss what problems they had faced as a result of the pandemic and what they felt the solutions should be. Notes of their discussions were captured on flipcharts, which were displayed on the walls during the Summit, and collected following the event.

A summary of the key themes arising from the discussions is as follows:

Theme	%
The need for clear information sharing regarding COVID-19	20
Issues relating to online platform/social media use	6
Health and wellbeing (including mental health)	32
Inequality	4
Education	31
Transport	3
Domestic violence	1
Missed milestones	3



A summary of the points from the discussion from both the flipcharts and the feedback given during the event is as follows:

### 1. What are the problems faced by young people as a result of the pandemic?

Theme
Misinformation spreading online/on social media
A lack of clear communication about Covid – e.g. messaging about rules etc. being confusing or is not translated into different languages
Remote learning having disproportionate impacts – digital divide
Social media fuelled issues like bullying, mental health problems including EDs, too much time on social media
Healthcare services under-funded, waiting times are long
Mental health services inadequate
Pandemic caused economic inequality – foodbanks, families saw income immediately drop, furlough
Schools not consistent with provision of home learning material/equipment

Theme
Teachers struggled to keep up with what's required of them
Mental health not taken seriously at school
Issues faced by people from ethnic minorities – language barriers, misconception/ racism by others
Pupils have missed out on PSHE e.g. sex education
Pandemic has been more difficult for e.g. neurodivergent young people
Poor mental health – stress, isolation from friends, family, school, worried about future
Lack of education about vaccine
School attendance has taken a huge hit
Transport negatively impacted – bus timetables, cost
Domestic abuse, child abuse
Social issues worsened – racism, homophobia, transphobia
Difficult going through life events when in lockdown – e.g. coming out
Physical health affected – missed opportunities to exercise
Too much screentime, don't like using tech for lessons/appointments
Bereavement
Concerns about contracting COVID

## 2. What are the solutions you would like to see in the future?

Theme
Peer support/mental health support in schools
More mental health support – funding
Improve mental health support – more individual therapies, should target individual circumstances, not one-size-fits-all
More funding or awareness-raising for youth clubs
Better train teachers to be able to handle mental health issues of pupils
Support for lost time in education
Better fund healthcare services – for in-person appointments, better funding for doctors/nurses
Group activities/clubs e.g. sport & leisure to alleviate mental health problems

Theme
Climate change – ban single use plastics; more recycling bins; cycle routes; recycling in schools and electric buses
Better provision of work/means to complete it when self-isolating
More support with predicted grades
Better educational support from teachers – online learning should be interactive
Bridge the digital poverty divide in case of future lockdown
Offer support for exams
Economic support e.g. free buses/school meals
Give teachers pay rise
Clarity/ imposing of mask-wearing needed, hand sanitiser etc.
Community projects to tackle isolation and bring people together
Recognise the benefits that social media has had on young people's lives since the pandemic
Education on why social restrictions are necessary instead of forcing them on people
Translate more info on Covid-19 into other languages so everyone can understand
Support with transitions – primary to secondary/GCSE to college

## 7.0 Make Your Mark Campaign

The Make Your Mark (MYM) campaign gives all young people aged 11-18 in the UK the chance to have a say on what they feel are the biggest issues they face.

It takes place annually with the support of the local authority. Ballots were disseminated to all secondary education settings in Tameside.

Children are encouraged to 'vote' on a set of ten topical issues, picking the one that matters to them the most. These issues are selected by Members of Youth Parliament.

In 2022, the issues presented to young people were as follows:

- Covid-19 recovery
- Education and learning
- Environment
- Health & wellbeing
- Jobs, money, homes and opportunities
- Our rights and democracy
- Poverty

The total number of votes cast in Tameside was 5,888. The 3 most popular issues among Tameside children were:

1. Jobs, money, homes, and opportunities;
2. Health and wellbeing
3. Education and learning

Tameside young people showed up for the borough even more than ever this year – based on percentage turnout, Tameside was in the top 20 areas nationwide, and the fifth highest turnout in the North West.

Findings from engagement with children and young people on a national level:

### Mental health

Nationally, the picture is very similar. According to a series of ongoing surveys by the mental health charity, Young Minds, children and young people have consistently said that their mental health had taken a hit as a result of the pandemic. In March 2020, 83% said the pandemic had made their mental health worse. During lighter restrictions this fell marginally to 80%, often related to feelings of anxiety, isolation, a loss of coping mechanisms or a loss of motivation. In the third national lockdown, young people were finding it harder to cope, speaking of loneliness, isolation, concerns about school work and expressing fears about the future.

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According to surveys with children carried out by Barnardo's, boredom (51%), worry (28%) and feeling trapped (26%) were the top three emotions experienced by children and young people in lockdown. A third also said they had more trouble sleeping, which could have a knock-on effect on school work, behavioural issues and family life.

Data released from the NHS on the mental health of children and young people in England in 2021 shows that rates of mental health issues have increased since 2017. The data was collected from mental health surveys responded to by over 3,000 children and young people. It reported that nearly 40% of 6-16 year olds had experienced a deterioration in their mental health, rising to 52% for those aged 17-19.

The Children's Commissioner, an independently appointed advocate for the rights and wellbeing of children and young people, published results from their biggest ever survey in September 2021. It found differences among children and young people when it comes to their mental health. Girls were twice as likely as boys to report feeling unhappy with their mental health. Older children (aged 9-17) were more likely to be unhappy – with girls aged 16 and 17 being the least happy with their mental health. Children in care were less likely to be happy than their peers, and children who said their family life was not good were also more likely to be unhappy.

## Missed education

Missed education has been a running challenge for children and young people throughout lockdowns and continuing into the lifting of restrictions. A report by the National Foundation for Education Research noted that just over half of pupils taught remotely in April 2020 did not usually have any live or real-time lessons. 92% received some 'offline provision such as worksheets or recorded videos. 42% of primary pupils and 54% of secondary pupils received at least three offline lessons a day, suggesting to NFER that limited pupils access to IT at home was a factor in these findings. Schools remained open for the children of key workers or children identified as vulnerable. However it was found that the weekly average proportion of vulnerable pupils who were attending school or college was around 11% until May 2020 (PAC), and by the end of the summer term in July 2020 was 26% (NAO).

Home learning, for those who could access it, was not reported to be suitable for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Young people told the Council for Disabled Children that the amount of screen time was overwhelming, that they did not have the teaching assistance they would normally have to help them through it, Zoom at times triggered their sensory sensitivity or group Zooms were not tolerable.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimated in February 2021 that by the time children returned to school in March, they would have missed over half a year of normal, in-person schooling in that school year alone. This is likely to be more than 5% of their entire time in school. This estimate does not take into account the time missed by individuals, classes or year groups missing further time in school due to self-isolation following contact with positive Covid cases.

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Research for the Department for Education found that by the first half of the autumn 2020 term, pupils had experienced a learning loss of up to two months in reading (primary and secondary) and up to three months in maths (primary level). This is highly likely to vary across different groups. At secondary school level, learning losses in schools that have a high proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds were around 50% higher than those schools with very few pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Younger children are more likely to find lost learning more difficult. In the same research, primary pupils were found to have regressed further in their learning in the Spring term than they did in the Autumn one.

Missed education is not limited to periods of national lockdown. A report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that even when restrictions on schools were lifted, learning time continued to be disrupted largely due to extensive self-isolation. On average, children in the survey lost out on 8 days of school during the autumn 2020 term because of the need to isolate. While they were isolating, 40% of pupils had access to interactive learning resources when asked to self-isolate during the 2020 autumn term, substantially less than during national school closures the previous term. Furthermore, during the Autumn term, poorer pupils tended to spend longer in isolation and had more limited access to learning resources during this time.

## Catch up

Estimates of how much more learning children have to do in order to catch up with lost learning in school are vague. According to the UK government Tsar on Missed Education, to reverse months of lost learning and prevent total lost future earnings for pupils running into the tens of billions of pounds, a 'multi-year' programme of support will be needed. This would include extended school hours for social and academic activities, additional Pupil Premium funding, summer wellbeing programmes, further mental health support in schools and the option for some pupils to retake the year.

An IFS report on home learning experiences has argued that targeted interventions are 'probably essential' to closing education inequalities that have arisen as a result of the pandemic. While the home learning experience gap narrowed between national lockdowns, it argues that this pattern will not be enough to offset educational gaps in catch-up. It further states: 25% of parents think their child will take at least a school year to catch up on lost learning; 7% think that their child will never catch up. While most parents support tutoring, parents of richer pupils are more likely to have taken up the offer of catch-up tuition. Therefore catch-up policies need to be carefully designed and incorporated into the school day where possible, to ensure that they are accessed by the pupils who stand to benefit the most.

At the same time, while children and young people were suddenly spending less time in universal services such as schools, a departmental survey of local authorities found that there were 82,890 referrals to children's social care services during the weeks surveyed between 27 April and 16 August 2020, which was about 15% less than the average for the same period over the previous three years. Referrals stayed lower than usual between September until early November. These figures show how lockdown restrictions cut off children and young people from vital services, particularly those who were already vulnerable and in need of support.

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## The experiences of disadvantaged children and young people

An unmistakable finding of engagement with children and young people is that there are clear disparities in the challenges they face as a result of the pandemic. Health, family background and income were among the range of factors that ultimately determine the experience of the pandemic and how well young people were able to cope.

A BBC Children in Need report delving into the impact the pandemic has had on vulnerable young people found 8 key themes of challenges:

- 1. Isolation:** children and families were missing personal connections, relationships and support from trusted adults and peers outside the home.
- 2. Increased emotional wellbeing and mental health challenges:** the pandemic was impacting on existing mental health and new issues were emerging for children and their parents. Anxiety, fear and stress are particular concerns.
- 3. Pressure on family relationships:** families were under pressure from difficulties coping with stress and worry to crisis. Conflict and difficult relationships were increasing, whilst respite for children and parents was reducing.
- 4. Increased exposure to harm:** children faced increased risks both within families and outside the home, e.g. with increased time online and being unable to access safe spaces.
- 5. Basic needs are harder to meet:** children and families faced hunger and increased financial hardship. Digital access became a basic need in lockdown.
- 6. Reduced access to education & activities:** children lacked the stimulation, development opportunities, structure & positive engagement these can bring.
- 7. Risks to physical wellbeing:** children's physical wellbeing was at risk through reduced nutrition or physical activity for fitness, for those with health conditions, and from the pandemic itself.
- 8. Concern for the future:** children, young people and families were concerned for the future, such as education transitions, loss of jobs or risks to job prospects and financial stability.

Also disparities in accessing education during the pandemic, in May 2020, it was estimated that children from higher-income families spent around 30% more time on remote learning compared with children from lower-income families. Furthermore, children received varying support from their school according to socio-economic status: 64% of secondary school pupils from the richest fifth of households were offered some form of active help compared with 47% from the poorest one-fifth. A study by the Education Endowment Foundation found a deterioration in reading and maths ability across all pupils but that this was greater among those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Among year 2 pupils, the attainment gap for reading is now seven months and for maths, eight months. This gap was 6 months in 2019.

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Children with special educational needs and disabilities also face disproportionate challenges when it comes to education. Such children found remote learning especially difficult, and some lost access to specialist support and equipment, increasing risks to their health and welfare. According to research with young people by the Council for Disabled Children, the most common theme of their experiences, like other children, was being unable to see family or friends and the emotional struggles that come with it. However, additionally for young people with SEND, ongoing opportunities for social interaction were essential, especially for those for whom it does not come naturally. While some young people said they preferred being out of social settings, others said it made them feel low or depressed as a result.

The loss of routine and structure normally provided by school created anxiety, stress and behavioural issues. Loss of routine was said to disrupt eating and sleeping patterns, and triggered an increase in behavioural issues at home.

As for disparities in mental health, a sample of over 2,000 parents recruited through social media reported deteriorating mental health and increased behavioural problems among children aged 4 to 11 years between March and May 2020 (during lockdown). The more socio-economically deprived respondents had consistently worse mental health in both surveys showing that mental health issues linked to the pandemic worsen for children in such families.

### **Children claiming asylum in the UK or with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)**

Children and young people who have arrived in the UK seeking asylum, according to government guidance, are among the most vulnerable in the country. As such they face a disproportionately higher risk as a result of the pandemic. Children from migrant or asylum-seeking families are already at high risk of discrimination, destitution, social isolation and are dependent on specialist and advocacy services in order to access their entitlements in the UK. As with many public services, the Home Office system for interviewing such children ground to a halt as a result of the pandemic. Consequently many children face long delays in having a decision made on their claim. These delays are known to be having serious repercussions on their mental and physical health, including reports of self-harm, insomnia and stress-related disorders, according to the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit. Their report found young people are suffering a 'devastating emotional impact' while waiting to hear on their status in the UK. The average waiting time in Greater Manchester is 410 days. During this time social workers report that young asylum seekers' relationships with friends and adults in their lives also break down. The Children's Society state that they have particular concerns for young people with a precarious immigration status who risk falling between the cracks – unable to access healthcare, likely to suffer an income shock, insecure housing or miss vital access to support such as school meals during the crisis.

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Beyond their asylum status, young asylum-seekers face other challenges. In a study of 14 local authorities by the University of Bedfordshire, young asylum-seekers in the leaving care system faced issues with learning English online during the pandemic due to a combination of language barriers and reduced one-to-one support, making it more difficult to ask questions in an online environment. Furthermore asylum-seeking young people have been isolated from their community because of Covid-19 – for many, either their church or mosque is their community but they have not been able to celebrate things like Ramadan. This also impacted learning English as they have not had interaction with their community due to social restrictions. The research also found challenges asylum-seekers face waiting for a decision on their status in moving on from semi-independent accommodation. They cannot be moved on because they haven't got any kind of right to accommodation until they have those decisions made, leaving young people in a limbo. Compounded with challenges learning English, this also impacts young people's ability to rent privately due not being able to understand or communicate with landlords.

In Tameside, local services supporting refugees, asylum-seekers and people with no recourse to public funds are known to have had a particularly bad experience during lockdown. This group of people relied heavily on Infinity Initiatives' (II) service (and others) for food, advice, support, translation and company. This group are within the highest risk of being digitally excluded owing to an array of factors: poverty, language barriers, access to resources, lack of geographical knowledge and no or limited access to Wi-Fi. Even in cases where people were supported with tablets and smart phones, there was the need to further invest in boosters as occupants lived in houses in multiple occupation (HMO) often across various floors and thick obstructing walls. Owing to public services and faith based / third sector organisations being closed it has been learnt that many individuals and families have slipped through the net.

Lived experience of young people seeking asylum shows how social restrictions have meant much more severe consequences for those who are in a new country with little social connections, language or money. For example:

*This particular young man (M) came to England seeking asylum, is 19 years old and lives in accommodation with three other men, all from different countries, speaking different languages. M had a missed weekly payment (as did so many others) as the holding company for the payment card changed hands. There was a period where admin errors meant people went without payment and as such food, travel and phone credit. This devastated M as he only had one friend in England with whom he sought asylum with but they got separated between Salford and Tameside, so being able to travel to see one another was a lifeline, something they could not do in the height of lockdown. Since this experience, M has made friends after being isolated in his earlier days in England. However he has not received his application registration card (ARC), unfortunately a common occurrence. After discussions with Serco there has been no action and so services can only help by taking the matter to the local MP, support that not all young asylum-seeking people are guaranteed.*

It is a fear for all those without their support who really struggled and went without food for that entire week. It is difficult to know the full impact of this. Errors like this lead to poor mental health, increased risk of exploitation and criminality.

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## Children and young people in the criminal justice system

Children and young people in the criminal justice system represent another group among young people that are extremely vulnerable. These young people face the added strain of being incarcerated away from their social networks and with daily liberties such as socialising, exercising and education reduced. Therefore in the wake of the pandemic, they face further impacts compared to their peers when it comes to emotional and mental wellbeing, access to education and leisure activity.

Incarcerated young people already faced social deprivation on account of being away from their family networks. However the pandemic deepened the severity of their isolation away from family and friends. According to a 2020 study on the impact of Covid-19 on children in prison, the standard prison regime had been paused due to the pandemic. Education in YOIs and STCs was restricted with educational activities limited to provision of worksheets in cells. Social contact within institutions was further curbed with children spending more time in their cells with no social contact. Children in custody rely heavily on contact with the outside world. As well as restricted activity within institutions, lockdown meant cessation of personal and professional visits.

Care leavers in custody faced similar issues. In addition to isolation in cells and little access to educational and recreational activities, there were barriers in them receiving support from their allocated personal advisors. A study by the University of Bedfordshire found that some local authorities, in order to stay in touch with young people leaving care who are in custody, were allocating funding so that they could communicate via email. Care leavers in custody faced barriers in communicating with their personal advisors from custody as they were unable to visit due to the pandemic, weakening their relationships with professionals.

While the impact on incarcerated young people is not yet widely understood, it is clear that the impacts the pandemic has on their emotional, mental, social and educational wellbeing will be deepened by their status of being in the criminal justice system. Social deprivation is likely to have a disproportionate impact on adolescents with far-reaching consequences for their wellbeing. This is a cause for concern for the long-term mental wellbeing of young people who are at a point where social contact and enjoyment is crucial in their life.

## Children and young people with a parent in the criminal justice system

Similarly, children with a parent in prison during the pandemic have felt the effects of prison lockdown where inmates are kept in cells for 23 hours per day, with visits halted and with little more than short phone calls to stay in touch. Loss of contact with family members in prison has negatively impacted children and young people's mental health, their relationships with their family and their physical wellbeing. Prior to the pandemic, most (96%) children in families where a parent is in prison enjoyed regular visits and calls, with two thirds having in-person visits every week. However pre-pandemic, children with a parent in prison experience 'confounding grief' and disruption to home life in the short term, and are more likely to experience mental health difficulties in the long term.

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The pandemic has meant that phone contact is the only way of reaching family members in prison, however this in itself caused difficulties: calls are less frequent than before, they are too short, many children are unable to engage over the phone due to age or disability, the cost of the calls is high and the timing is a barrier.

As a result, children's relationships with their family have suffered, the long-term consequences of which are still unknown. Many children couldn't understand why their parent was no longer in touch, many blamed themselves or believed their parent no longer loved them. Physical contact is essential to bonding and the development of relationships; without this, many children missed their parent and many no longer wanted to engage.

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## 8.0 Recommendations

1. **Agree strategic approach** to recognise the issues faced by young people as a result of missed education.
  2. **Implement** a joined up approach with existing digital exclusion work to focus on children & young people.
  3. **Tailor** important communications that affect children and young people in Tameside, so that they can be understood
  4. **Agree and implement** a policy or set of guiding principles for meaningful and fair engagement with young people
  5. **Launch a one-stop webpage** detailing the offer of mental health support, so that children and young people know exactly what support they can access
  6. **Domestic violence** - link in with the Strategic Domestic Abuse Manager
  7. **Strengthen local support to asylum-seeking families/children** in families with no recourse to public funds
  8. **Missed milestones** – package to acknowledge that it has been difficult for young people who have missed key events while we were in lockdown or encourage schools to hold events to mark the milestones young people missed in lockdown
  9. **Inequality** – pledge to listen to and recognise the concerns young people have about inequality that has come out of the pandemic
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## 9.0 References

1. **Tameside & Glossop Partnership Engagement Network Covid-19 Build Back Fairer Engagement Session** – Summer 2020
  2. **Children in Care Council & Care Leavers Survey**
  3. **Corporate Parenting Board**
  4. **Tameside Youth Summit** (November 2021)
  5. **Make Your Mark** – 2021 and 2022
  6. **National Audit Office** – Supporting children’s education during the early stages of the Covid-19 Pandemic (2021)
  7. **Young Minds** - Coronavirus impact on young people with mental health needs (2020-21)
  8. **The Big Barnardo’s Conversation** (2020)
  9. **NHS: Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021** - Wave 2 Follow Up to the 2017 Survey
  10. **The Children’s Commissioner** – The Big Ask Survey (2021)
  11. **National Foundation for Educational Research** – Home learning during Covid-19: Findings from the Understanding Society Longitudinal Study (2020)
  12. **Council for Disabled Children** – lessons learnt from lockdown: the highs and lows of the pandemic’s impact on disabled children and young people. (2021)
  13. **Institute for Fiscal Studies** – Learning during the lockdown: real-time data on children’s experiences during home learning (2020)
  14. **Education Policy Institute** – Learning loss research: Understanding progress in the 2020 to 2021 academic year (2021)
  15. **BBC News: School catch-up Tsar resigns over lack of funding (2021)**
  16. **BBC Children in Need** – Understanding the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people – early pandemic period April-May 2020
  17. **Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit** – Wasted childhoods – the impact of COVID-19 asylum delays on children (2021)
  18. **University of Bedfordshire** – Care Leavers, Covid-19 and the transition from Care (CCTC study) (May 2021)
  19. **Infinity Initiatives**
  20. **Journal of Children’s Services** – Bateman, T. Unjust pains: the impact of COVID-19 on children in prison (2020)
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