

To: Directors of Children's Services

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16 June 2010

Dear Colleague

CONTACTPOINT: NEXT STEPS AND INTERIM OPERATIONS

The Government has made clear its intention to end ContactPoint as soon as is practicable. In the meantime, while ContactPoint remains in use, its operations will be scaled down. This letter provides guidance for local authorities and other partners about interim operations. It also outlines the new direction that Ministers have asked us to consider, and the likely timing of further developments.

A Different Approach

The Government is committed to supporting practitioners working with vulnerable children, and to reducing bureaucracy. A new approach would therefore focus on helping practitioners find out whether another practitioner is working with a vulnerable child and might provide a signposting service for a limited number of key professionals. The approach would particularly take account of the needs of children who move between different local authority areas or who access services in more than one local authority. We will continue to engage our partners to ensure that policy is properly informed by their knowledge and expertise.

The Government recognises that significant investment has already been made in developing ContactPoint and the infrastructure that supports it. In considering a new approach, the Government will seek to make the most appropriate use of that investment wherever practicable.

We expect to be able to announce more detail on the way forward later in the summer.

Interim operation

As an interim measure, Ministers have decided to maintain ContactPoint in

limited operation pending firmer decisions on what should come after it.

Annex A sets out the nature of the limited service and the key requirements for operation and management of ContactPoint during this interim period. It both covers what we intend to do centrally and provides guidance on what local authorities and partners should do to ensure the safe and legal operation of ContactPoint. Local authorities will need to make judgements locally about how to allocate resources in order to meet their obligations.

Funding

We recognise that, during this interim phase, local authorities and other partners will continue to incur costs. We have confirmed the intention to meet the grant payment for the first quarter of 2010/11 – that is, up until the end of June 2010. The Government is considering the extent of grant funding beyond this period, and we will provide further guidance as soon as we are able to do so.

Longer term

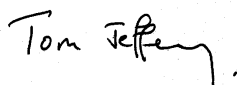
In due course, we will give notice as to when ContactPoint will cease to operate. At that time, access to the system will be revoked centrally – local authorities and National Partners will not need to do anything technically to enable this change. Similarly, the removal of data from ContactPoint will be managed centrally, under strictly controlled conditions. We also intend to take necessary steps in relation to the ContactPoint Regulations as soon as is practicable.

We will provide further information to local authorities and other partners in due course about the impact, timings and effects of closing down the system. This will include guidance on what may need to be done locally, such as what to do with tokens, documents and reports. In the meantime, please ensure that you continue to treat any information which you have stored in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

I am sure you will appreciate that there remains a lot to do before we can have complete clarity on the way forward. I do however hope that this letter answers some of the key questions people have.

Local authorities and National Partners will of course continue to have questions about day-to-day operational matters. The Implementation Coordinators dedicated to each region, the Central Service Management Team, and the central team here at the Department will continue to be on hand to respond to queries as far as we are able.

Yours sincerely



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CONTACTPOINT: INTERIM OPERATIONS

This annex sets out the key statutory requirements for operation and management of ContactPoint during the interim period. It aims to provide guidance on national and local activity while ContactPoint remains in operation. It does not provide an exhaustive list of all possible activity or detail. For further information, local authorities and National Partners should contact their Implementation Coordinator or the Central Service Management Team at the Department for Education.

National activity:

National data

- A feed of birth and death registration data from the General Register Office will continue, in order to help maintain the currency of basic child records.
- Updates from the Department for Work and Pensions, NHS Connecting for Health and this Department's School Census will stop.

National support

- Support at the centre will continue, but is being scaled down to what is necessary to support the secure and legal operation of ContactPoint in the short-term, and to manage the eventual shut down and decommissioning.

Local activity:

Operational activities

Under the ContactPoint Regulations, local authorities are responsible for the records of children in their area. In applying the Regulations, local authorities, National Partners and other partner organisations should continue to consider existing guidance provided by the Department. Specifically, the following activities will need to continue:

- Manage users: Existing users may continue to use ContactPoint while it remains in operation. ContactPoint must be used only for the purpose for which it was developed, as set out in existing guidance, and by those who have been trained and authorised to use it. Specific tasks relating to management of users include:

- monitoring and auditing use of ContactPoint, which includes running and actioning operational user reports;
- taking appropriate action if you become aware of, or suspect, unusual or suspicious activity relating to ContactPoint;
- terminating users' access when necessary;
- continuing user management activities (e.g. password resets); and
- continuing to provide local support to existing users.
- Manage data:
 - Shielding. Follow the existing processes relating to management of shielded records. This involves responding appropriately (in accordance with guidance) to requests to shield records.
 - Continue to manage pre- and post-adoption activities.
 - Cleaning activity. Maintain accuracy of records for which the local authority is responsible. The local authority must take reasonable steps to correct any inaccuracy or to complete the record. Data cleaning activities must continue in order to maintain accuracy. In particular the following tests should continue:
 - 'No Match'
 - 'Multiple Match'
 - Accountable Body allocation. It is important to ensure that records are allocated to the correct accountable body by running and working the following cleaning tests:
 - 'Proposed transfer to Accountable Body'
 - 'Accountable Body transfer status; "Under Review"'
 - 'Rejected transfer to Accountable Body'.
- Security: You must ensure that appropriate ContactPoint security processes are in place at a local authority and partner level.
- Helpdesks and user support: You should continue to run appropriate customer service arrangements. This includes having processes in place to respond to complaints.
- Compliance with Data Protection Act. As data controllers in common for ContactPoint, local authorities have duties to:
 - inform people about the information that is held on ContactPoint and how it will be used (see existing guidance on Fair Processing/Privacy Notices); and
 - respond appropriately to Subject Access Requests regarding ContactPoint. Local authorities must continue to have processes in place to do this.

Implementation activities

Local data/system accreditation: In general, no new local data sources should be added. We shall however consider possible exceptions where a data source may be relevant and useful for an alternative approach, focused on vulnerable children, for example, from local social care systems.

Organisation accreditation: Similar considerations apply as above. We recognise that the organisation accreditation process has broader benefits, so authorities and partners are of course free to apply the principles for other purposes.

Training and setting up new user accounts: We would discourage the training of new users. However, this is a decision for local authorities and National Partners. They may consider in particular cases that it would be appropriate to continue to train practitioners who work directly in support of the children most in need.

Reporting: These upcoming grant delivery milestones stand:

- No. 4. An Annual Compliance Statement for 2009-10, by the end of June 2010.
- No. 6. A Financial Statement of Expenditure for 2009-10, by the end of July 2010.