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To Chief Executives of local authorities in England, Directors of Children's Services,  
Channel Panel Chairs, Chairs of Local Children's Safeguarding Boards  
*[By email]*

Dear Colleague,

## **SAFEGUARDING BRITISH MINORS RETURNING FROM THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA AND IRAQ**

The recent terrorist attacks in Manchester and London remind us of the significant challenge we face and the importance of work to safeguard our communities from radicalisation. The police and security agencies work constantly to disrupt plots, this includes managing the risk posed by those who have engaged in terrorist activity in Syria or Iraq. Equally, local authorities across the country are playing a crucial role in protecting vulnerable children from the threat of radicalisation.

You will be aware that, despite our combined best efforts, a number of British children either travelled or were taken to Syria by their parents to join terrorist organisations. As the situation in Syria evolves, and as Daesh (also known as IS or ISIL) in particular loses territory, we are likely to see some of them return to the UK.

We therefore wish to draw your attention to the recent advice produced by the Department for Education. This advice, backed by the Association of the Directors of Children's Services, has been developed with the Home Office and in collaboration with a number of local authorities. It will help local authorities better understand the experiences of children returning from Syria, and the support available to safeguard them.

The majority of these children have lived in a warzone for a number of years. They will have been exposed to terrorism and extremist ideology, and witnessed incidents such

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as violence, murder, death, beheadings, rape and many other horrors that will almost certainly have had an impact on their mental and emotional development. Some will have undertaken military training, and/or been involved in terrorist activity during their time in Syria.

As set out in the advice, we have created a new national programme funded by the Home Office that will provide local authorities with expert support on the mental and emotional needs of returning British children to help them reintegrate and build a stable life in the UK. Representatives from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust (0208 938 2226 / [ReturningFamilies@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:ReturningFamilies@tavi-port.nhs.uk)) will be able to attend initial safeguarding strategy meetings to offer advice and share their experiences from safeguarding returning children in other local authority areas, on top of offering appropriate interventions if agreed by the local authority multi-agency panel.

A linked Home Office programme to provide key worker support to help safeguard returning children and provide stability to their family is being developed. Local authorities can obtain more information on this by contacting [Returning.Families@homeoffice.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Returning.Families@homeoffice.x.gsi.gov.uk).

Police will work closely with local authorities throughout the return and management of minors. In the event that local authorities initiate any court proceedings as a result of police information, they should consult the police at least two weeks before the proceedings and provide police with copies of court statements. This will help police advise whether additional relevant material exists for disclosure that could support the proceedings.

The Home Office has also created a new *Desistance and Disengagement* programme aimed at changing the behaviour and beliefs of people who are unsuitable for Channel, given they may be of a higher risk or already radicalised. Accordingly this *Desistance and Disengagement* programme provides funding for more intensive and bespoke interventions than Channel. More information on the programme can be obtained from the Home Office at [D&DProgramme@homeoffice.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:D&DProgramme@homeoffice.x.gsi.gov.uk).

As these children and their families may return to the UK at short notice, we recommend that local authorities ensure emergency contact details are up to date and include the contact points above.

Given the unique nature of children returning from Syria, I would be grateful if you could disseminate this information and the guidance to other relevant colleagues in your authority who you think may wish to be aware.

We remain committed to safeguarding children and minimising the risk they could potentially pose. Both our departments regularly liaise with and listen to local authorities to evaluate the work we do to ensure that it is successful. We have also attached a feedback form to this letter for local authorities which have a family return, to share their experience and help us understand whether our advice, polices and support are working well or need improvement. If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised by this letter, please do not hesitate to contact our teams at [Returning.Families@homeoffice.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Returning.Families@homeoffice.x.gsi.gov.uk) and [counter.extremism@education.gov.uk](mailto:counter.extremism@education.gov.uk).

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We are copying this letter to Prevent leads in relevant areas and Police and Health Regional Prevent co-ordinators.

Yours sincerely,



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Director General, OSCT



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Director General, IFD