

To: Directors of Children's Services

Chief Executives of ContactPoint
National Partners

www.education.gov.uk

22 July 2010

Dear Colleague

DECOMMISSIONING CONTACTPOINT

My letter of 16 June provided an update on ContactPoint and our thinking on a different approach to help practitioners working with vulnerable children. I am writing today with a further update, which:

- sets out the Government's proposal to develop an alternative, signposting approach, targeted at vulnerable children; and
- confirms the closure of ContactPoint, setting out the timetable for its shut down and decommissioning. This letter provides guidance for local authorities, National Partners and other partners about the activities that need to be undertaken over the next few weeks, and funding and other support available during this period.

Ministers have today made a Written Ministerial Statement to inform Parliament. You can access a copy of the Statement on the DfE website. Copies of this letter have also been placed in the House Libraries.

A Different Approach

Since 16 June, we have continued to consider the scope for a new approach to support key practitioners to help protect vulnerable children from harm. Frontline practitioners need to be able to provide support for our most vulnerable children when they move across local authority boundaries or access services in more than one area. Experience shows the potential value of a quick and reliable means of discovering whether another professional has worked with such a child.

Ministers do not consider that ContactPoint is the answer. They have decided to explore the practicality of a national signposting approach, which would focus on helping a strictly limited group of practitioners to find out whether a colleague elsewhere is working, or has previously worked, with the same vulnerable child. We are working closely with our partners to assess the feasibility and affordability of such an approach and will provide an update in the autumn.

As we proceed, we shall take all necessary steps to ensure that the investment made to date in developing ContactPoint can help so far as possible protect the most vulnerable children. We will continue to draw on views, experience and expertise of frontline staff and managers. Any service must provide a modern, effective tool for the frontline and support the broader aims of Eileen Munro's Review of social work practice. It is essential that any development and implementation costs are kept to a minimum and that the service can demonstrate value for money. More broadly, Ministers recognise the significant advances made by many local authorities in improving the quality and use of local data, in part stimulated by their efforts to implement ContactPoint. Building on these can help make services more efficient and transparent, and inform better commissioning.

ContactPoint

As you know, for an interim period we have maintained ContactPoint in a limited way while we considered how far the investment to date might be re-used. It is now evident that development of a signposting approach along the lines desired does not require ContactPoint to be kept in operation. Ministers have accordingly decided to switch off ContactPoint and permanently decommission the database, in line with the long-standing policy commitments of both Coalition parties.

We will close ContactPoint in a managed, secure and controlled way.

ContactPoint will be switched off at noon on 6 August 2010, allowing time for local authorities, National Partners and other partners to undertake the necessary activities prior to switch off. From the time it is switched off, ContactPoint will no longer be accessible to users or to data administrators. Decommissioning the database will take longer and will be done in compliance with Government security and operational standards.

Annex A provides guidance on what local authorities and National Partners need to do. It covers what we will do centrally and what local authorities and National Partners should do to ensure the safe and legal close down of ContactPoint. You will want to ensure that your project lead is able to take the necessary steps.

Electronic enablement of the Common Assessment Framework (eCAF)

We are continuing to roll-out eCAF to Early Adopters. Closing down and decommissioning ContactPoint has some implications for eCAF. Accordingly, changes will need to be made to the eCAF system, processes and supporting documentation. We will continue to work closely with Phase 1 Early Adopters

as we make these adjustments. We will provide further information about eCAF in due course.

Funding

We recognise that, during this interim phase, local authorities have continued to incur costs in respect of their ContactPoint responsibilities. In addition to grant funding already provided to meet the period 1 April to 30 June 2010, we will provide additional grant funding to cover the period from 1 July to 31 August. Funding for ContactPoint remains ringfenced and use of funds must be consistent with the terms and conditions set out in the grant funding letter and annexes of 14 January 2010. Annex A provides more details about the timing and process for claiming grant funding.

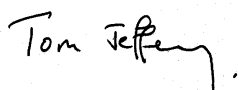
We are discussing separately with National Partners grant funding to cover this period.

Legislation

The operation of ContactPoint is governed by section 12 of the Children Act and the *Children Act 2004 Information Database (England) Regulations 2007*, as amended in 2010. The Regulations place statutory responsibilities on local authorities and data suppliers to participate in the database when it is in operation. When ContactPoint is switched off, local authorities and other partners will no longer have access to ContactPoint and the duties placed on them will no longer apply. We shall in due course seek Parliamentary approval to make appropriate changes to the Regulations.

The ContactPoint team at the Department are on hand to provide advice to local authorities and national partners during this time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Jeffery". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

TOM JEFFERY

Annex A

CONTACTPOINT DECOMMISSIONING – GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES, NATIONAL PARTNERS AND OTHER PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Closure of ContactPoint on 6 August 2010

The Government has announced that it will switch off ContactPoint and permanently decommission the database, in line with the long-standing policy commitments of both coalition parties.

ContactPoint will be switched off at noon on 6 August 2010, allowing time for local authorities, National Partners and other partners to undertake the necessary activities prior to switch off. From the time it is switched off, ContactPoint will no longer be accessible to users or to data administrators. Decommissioning the database will take longer and will be done in compliance with Government security and operational standards.

This guidance is for local authorities, National Partners and other partner organisations to support the activities performed centrally that will ensure that ContactPoint is shut down safely and effectively. Activities undertaken both nationally and locally must be compliant with relevant legislation, including the Data Protection Act and the Computer Misuse Act, and meet appropriate standards for security and audit.

How to use this guidance:

This guidance is split into 3 sections.

- Section 1 details the activities that are the responsibility of the Department for Education. Some of the activities are solely a national responsibility (for example deleting the database). Other activities are likely to be mirrored by local activities (such as communications).
- Section 2 contains guidance for local authorities, National Partners and local partner organisations on what they need to do, referring to relevant legislation where appropriate. It also contains recommendations for local project closure activities.
- Section 3, for ease of reference, provides a summary of both national and local¹ responsibilities.

¹ For ease of reading, the term 'local' refers to local authority and National Partner organisations.

1. NATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In order to ensure the secure and orderly shut down and decommissioning of ContactPoint, the Department for Education will undertake the following activities:

User access

Access to ContactPoint will be disabled at 12:00 midday on 6 August 2010. From this point, it will not be possible for the system to be accessed by any user including the Central Service Management (CSM) team. Access will be disabled by disconnecting the network connections. After this point no activities will be possible on the system.

DfE CSM will continue to monitor usage through audit reports until ContactPoint is shut down. The audit logs showing accesses made up until the point of system closure will be retained as required.

Data

Data – The database will be permanently deleted within eight weeks of system closure, using Government-approved processes and security standards (Information Assurance Standard 5 IAS5). This process will start within 24 hours of the system closure.

National data sources - Updates from the General Register Office for birth and death registration data will stop on 5 August 2010. Other feeds from national data sources have already ceased.

Local Data Quality Tool (LDQT) – Access to LDQT will be disabled at the same time as the ContactPoint system closure on 6 August 2010.

Audit logs – DfE is required by government information standards to retain an audit log of systems access. This log will be held securely for the period required by the applicable standards.

Audit logs will only be accessed in strictly limited circumstances, for example, to support an investigation into suspicious activity or misuse.

Funding

In addition to grant funding already provided to meet the period 1 April to 30 June 2010, we intend to provide grant funding to cover the period from 1 July to 31 August 2010, to cover costs incurred during this interim phase. Funding for ContactPoint remains ringfenced and use of funds must be consistent with the terms and conditions set out in the grant funding letter and annexes, dated 14 January 2010.

Please refer to Section 2 for further details.

Legislation

Once DfE has taken ContactPoint out of operation, the duties placed on local authorities and other partners by the ContactPoint Regulations² will not have effect in the absence of the database. Changing the Regulations will require Parliamentary approval in due course.

DfE will ensure that the shut down of ContactPoint complies with the Data Protection Act, the Computer Misuse Act and Government security standards.

Communications

A Written Ministerial Statement was laid in Parliament on 22 July 2010. DfE has issued written notice that it will shut down and decommission ContactPoint to senior and operational contacts in local authorities, National Partners, other government departments and other key stakeholders.

The relevant Department websites are being updated. Old content and documents will be removed.

Privacy notices - The privacy notices on the Every Child Matters site (including the *ContactPoint: Information for young people and parents* leaflet) will be removed. A new document will be available, which sets out what is happening to ContactPoint and its data and why. Privacy notice guidance available on Teachernet (including general LA privacy notices and schools privacy notices) will be updated.

Documents and resources

The Local Authority Readiness Assessment (LARA) system - Access to LARA will be disabled on Friday 13 August 2010.

Guidance and supporting materials - ContactPoint guidance and related materials will be removed from operation, and removed from publicly available areas (such as websites and Prolog). Documents will be securely archived or destroyed as appropriate.

Other guidance and materials - ContactPoint references will be removed, as far as possible, from documentation (such as guidance and training materials). These will be updated in due course.

Please refer to the corresponding part of Section 2 for recommendations for local authorities and partners.

² The *Children Act 2004 Information Database (England) Regulations 2007*, as amended in 2010

2. LOCAL ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Local authorities and partners must ensure they discharge their statutory duties in relation to ContactPoint, and manage the effective and controlled closure of ContactPoint. Activities must comply with the Data Protection Act, the Computer Misuse Act and HM Government security standards.

Implementation Coordinators will provide all local authority teams with a service closure template shortly. This will set out actions needed, and will guide local teams through the appropriate steps to manage safe closure of ContactPoint locally. Returns of completed templates will provide assurance that all actions have been completed nationally and locally for the safe and legal shut down of ContactPoint.

Local project/service closure activities

Local authorities and National Partners will need to decide what resources are required for shut down activities and project/service closure set out below. Local partner organisation teams should be closed in line with their local authority teams.

Any contracts entered into locally, including personnel and supplier contracts, need to be managed at a local level.

ContactPoint-specific policies and processes should be removed from operation. ContactPoint-specific data sharing agreements should be revoked. Any outstanding local authority project actions, issues and risks should be closed.

Monitoring users

Local authorities and National Partners must continue to monitor usage, as set out in interim guidance issued 16 June 2010, until ContactPoint is shut down and user access has been disabled (noon on 6 August). Local authorities and National Partners must consider how long they will need to retain audit reports (please refer to 'Service documentation' below).

Communications

Partner organisations and ContactPoint users – Local authorities are responsible for ensuring local partner organisations, users and suppliers receive appropriate communications, including written notice of ContactPoint closure. DfE recommend that this is done as soon as practicable. National Partners need to inform their users and other relevant stakeholders.

Those authorities acting as the lead organisation in a funded enablement project should liaise with their system supplier to ensure that the supplier is aware of all relevant aspects of ContactPoint closure.

General – Local authorities and National and local partners must ensure that old information and documentation about ContactPoint is removed/archived from their websites and other relevant areas as soon as practicable. Authorities and partners are recommended to add hyperlinks to the updated information on the Department's website, and can use content from our

websites and other formal communications to update their own websites as appropriate.

Privacy notices/fair processing - Young people and parents/carers - Local authorities and partners must ensure that existing fair processing/privacy notice documentation is updated appropriately, including broader privacy notices (such as general local authority privacy notices and schools privacy notices). This must be done in line with local protocols and in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Local authorities are recommended to use content from the updated DfE website and refer to guidance available on Teachernet.

Helpdesks and local teams – ensure your helpdesks (public and user support) and other local teams are appropriately briefed.

Tokens

All tokens should be returned to DfE CSM by Friday 13 August 2010.

Local authorities and National Partners must ensure the safe collection of tokens from users using existing procedures. Local authorities must collect all tokens from users for whom they are responsible, including those within partner organisations.

Tokens must be reset before they are returned. Please ask users to reset tokens to the transport PIN “1234” before returning tokens to you. Implementation Coordinators will provide all local authority and National Partner teams with a quick guide for resetting token PINs that can be forwarded to users.

When returning tokens please mark the internal envelope / box to indicate which LA/NP they have come from and whether they have been used.

Tokens should be sent by Royal Mail recorded delivery to:

IISaM Central Service Management, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT

Data

Local data feeds must be stopped on or before 5 August 2010. Authorities will need to inform their local data suppliers and IT teams to ensure this happens. From 6 August 2010, ContactPoint access will not be possible and any actions required locally to amend systems must be taken before this date.

Service documentation

Service documentation such as audit logs (including user reports and log books) and user access forms should be securely archived or destroyed as appropriate. Local authorities and all partner organisations need to decide what they need to retain for local compliance and audit purposes, and what may be required to support a possible investigation into misuse, should the case arise.

Decisions must be taken in line with local protocols and Data Protection Principles. All organisations must continue to treat any information they hold in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

Funding

The funding for ContactPoint remains ringfenced. Use of funds must be consistent with this guidance, and with:

- the terms and conditions set out in the grant funding letter and annexes, dated 14 January 2010;
- supplementary guidance provided in Annex A to Tom Jeffery's letter to Directors of Children's Services, dated 16 June 2010.

Grant funding will cease on 31 August 2010. A final grant will be paid to local authorities at the end of August, to cover the period 1 July 2010 to 31 August 2010. It will be calculated on the basis of two-thirds of a full quarter-year grant payment.

Local authorities will be required to submit a final financial return for this grant by the end of September 2010. We will write to local authorities in due course with further details.

Lessons learned and ensuring continued good practice

We recognise that many policies and processes that have been implemented locally have had broader benefits. Local authorities and partners have reported that the work done to meet accreditation criteria has driven improvements in local data quality, and helped to refine internal processes and procedures.

Authorities and partners will of course want to build on this work, and apply and make use of the principles for other purposes as and where appropriate in ways which can make services more efficient and transparent, and inform better commissioning (see documents section below regarding re-use of materials).

Authorities and partners should consider what they want to retain which may be of wider benefit. Evidence of meeting accreditation criteria may be of use in the future, in particular for eCAF. They may also want to consider producing a local lessons learned report, as a means of capturing good practice, highlighting key achievements, and identifying barriers and challenges particularly relevant to their organisation.

Documents and resources

Re-using existing material

Authorities and partners may want to re-use information from existing guidance and supporting materials currently available on LARA – for example accreditation processes and the partner workstation and infrastructure guidance. You will need to ensure you have copies of any material you require prior to 13 August.

All references to DfE, DCSF, ContactPoint and the policy objectives of ContactPoint, and any related branding must be removed from any documentation or content which is intended for re-use. DfE branding should not be used on local materials.

ContactPoint-specific guidance and operational materials and merchandise should be archived or destroyed in line with local protocols.

Other guidance and materials

Local authorities and partners must consider the removal of ContactPoint references in locally-tailored and produced materials, guidance and other documentation which are non-ContactPoint specific. You may also want to consider disclaimer statements for any materials which cannot be updated in the short term.

Reporting

As Annex A to Tom Jeffery's 16 June letter indicated, local authorities should complete and return the following:

- An Annual Compliance Statement for 2009-10 was due at the end of June 2010. Many thanks to all who have returned them. Please could all outstanding reports be returned as soon as possible.
- A Financial Statement of Expenditure for 2009-10, by the end of July 2010.

We will also need the following returns, and will provide more guidance on these in due course.

- A Final Financial Return for 2010-11 by 30 September 2010.
- Local service closure reports by 30 September 2010.

Support and advice

National

CSM and Implementation Coordinators will be available to provide ContactPoint service closure support until 13 August 2010. From that date any residual queries should be referred to the CSM mailbox, which will be monitored during working hours.

Local

Local authorities and partners are recommended to seek advice from their local data protection advisor, audit teams, legal advisors and HR as appropriate, to ensure compliance with local protocols for safe and legal shut down and decommissioning of any local elements of ContactPoint.

Implementation coordinators will be contacting local authority and National Partner teams shortly to confirm receipt of this guidance, discuss service closure activities and provide support on specific local issues.

3. OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Activity	National activities and responsibilities	Date	Local activities and responsibilities	Deadline
User access:	User access disabled. Networks disconnected so there is no mechanism for user access or data feed.	Noon on 6 Aug	Monitor usage until shut down. Retrieve tokens and return to DfE CSM	Noon on 6 Aug 13 Aug
Database:	Database deleted centrally	Commences 6 Aug and will be complete by mid September	n/a	n/a
Data sources:	Final national data source (GRO) will cease providing data. Mechanism for data feed disabled.	5 Aug	Ensure local data sources are amended to stop providing data	5 Aug
Service documentation:	Securely archive/destroy centrally-held service documentation as appropriate	31 Aug	Securely archive/destroy locally-held service documentation as appropriate	31 Aug
Legislation:	Make appropriate changes to Regulations	To be confirmed	n/a	n/a
Communications:	Issue communication to Parliament, local authorities,	22 Jul	Issue communication to local partners, users,	30 Jul

	National Partners, government departments, media and other key stakeholders		suppliers and other relevant local stakeholders	
	Issue reminder notices to operational teams	Weekly from 22 Jun and final reminder on 5 Aug	Issue reminder notices to partner orgs and users	Up to 5 Aug
	Update relevant websites	31 Aug	Update relevant websites	31 Aug
	Update national privacy notices	31 Aug	Update local privacy notices	31 Aug
Local Authority Readiness Assessment (LARA):	Access disabled	13 Aug	Download any required documents	13 Aug
Local Data Quality Tool (LDQT):	Access disabled	6 Aug	n/a	n/a

Department for Education
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