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To all Head Teachers and Governors of
Calderdale Maintained Schools

Children and Young People's Services

Northgate House
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Dear Colleague

I would like to update you with developments within children services that I know concern you.

First though I want to recognise that the start of this year has been incredibly challenging across our community; we have had weather that has caused disruption on a scale not seen for over 30 years and I understand some of the difficulties that you encounter in schools when it snows. I would like to thank you again for the diligence that you took in making decisions about operating schools in this period. You are often criticised regardless of the decisions you make and I know you have acted at all times with the safety and wellbeing of the children as your priority.

Many of you will also now know that Paul Brennan resigned as Head of Learning Services at the start of the year. I would like to assure you that I am working closely with the chairs of CPHA and CASH to look at the replacement for this vital role. Colleagues have expressed to me how important this role is and I share those views. Paul leaves at the end of March and I intend that we shall have a period of time with a handover to an interim successor prior to a permanent appointment. Both processes are already in train.

In addition, over the past two weeks Children's Trust partners have been engaged in a full inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children. That inspection concluded on Friday 29 January 2010. Many of you were involved in evidence gathering for this inspection and many school based colleagues contributed to this inspection. I would like to thank you all for your contributions and the report will be published on 26 February 2010, I will keep you fully briefed as we respond to the findings of the report.

Upon appointment as Director of Children's Services I was concerned about some aspects of Children's Social Care and I was keen to undertake a rigorous due diligence exercise. This included commissioning an in depth analysis of safeguarding by external consultants. That report was published today. It contains a clear analysis of shortcomings within some aspects of Children's Social Care. As a result of the findings I have instigated a far reaching action plan to address the issues as swiftly as possible. It is my intention that we will route out the causes of poor performance and put in place solutions that will be sustainable. You will see the press coverage of this report and you will understand that this is not comfortable reading, nevertheless it is the council's view that this is a necessary step on the route to recovery.

The current environment in which children's social workers operate is more challenging than it has ever been. I would like to ask for your support in the coming months to ensure that as a children's services

community, we pull together to repair services for our most vulnerable children and young people. I have enclosed for your information a copy of the Council's release of this morning.

Many thanks

Janet Donaldson
Director Children and Young People's Service

2 February 2010

Taking Action to Improve Services

Calderdale Council says it is taking immediate and decisive action to address concerns it has found about its children's social care services.

The Council recently commissioned a review into how aspects of children's services were run because it was concerned about the standards of care being offered to vulnerable children and families.

An independent report published today (Tuesday, February 2), highlights a number of areas of concern, particularly around:

- The Council's Initial Response Team – usually the first point of contact for children and families needing children's social services
- The Family Support and Child Protection Teams
- Systems for recording information about cases

Calderdale Council's Director of Children and Young People's Services, Janet Donaldson, says that it was imperative for her to take immediate and decisive action, to address the issues highlighted in the report.

"The state of affairs which the report uncovered is unacceptable and I want to reassure the people of Calderdale that we will take all necessary action to make sure that we will provide the high quality services our children deserve.

"The practice of some members of staff is of concern and as a result people have been suspended, which is a neutral act, but the decision has been taken in order to facilitate a full and thorough review of management practice. It is not appropriate for us to comment further on this at this stage other than to say that we are following the Council's agreed processes.

Among the measures we have already taken, we have:

- Taken immediate action to address those cases highlighted by the service reviewers where there were specific concerns.
- Introduced a Single Initial Response Team, so that there is one point of contact for children and families needing our help.



- Put a special team in place to ensure that each area of the service improves and improves quickly.
- Appointed an Improvement Board, which is chaired by the Chief Executive, to ensure that there is real and sustained improvement.
- Started an in-depth review of the management and organisation of the service.

“The report highlights that we are not doing well enough and we have already taken swift action to tackle the areas of concern and will continue to drive forward improvement.”

Calderdale Council’s Cabinet Member, Children and Young People, Cllr Craig Whittaker, says: “The safety of Calderdale’s children is paramount. All councillors have a responsibility as corporate parents to the children who are in our care. We need to ensure, first and foremost, that they are safe and that they receive the help and support they need promptly.

“I was concerned about the standard of children’s social services and I raised this with Janet Donaldson, who was appointed in August. Janet has taken swift action to get to the heart of the issues.

“This report, which was commissioned in October last year, is about the Council being honest with itself and rooting out those areas where improvement needs to be made. Where there are concerns, they must be addressed. In an area as important as children’s social care services, that needs to happen sooner rather than later.

“There can be no excuses for poor performance, particularly where the safety and welfare of vulnerable children is concerned.”

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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