

Improvement Notice

To: Name CALDERDALE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL (“the Council”)

Address Town Hall, Crossley Street, Halifax, West Yorkshire HX1 1UJ

This Improvement Notice is being issued due to poor performance in:
Children’s social care services.

On the basis of evidence contained in the:

- report of the inspection of safeguarding and looked after children’s services carried out by Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (published 26 February 2010) which judged the overall effectiveness of the Council’s safeguarding services to be ‘inadequate’;
- report of the unannounced inspection on contact, referral and assessment carried out by Ofsted (published 16 February 2011); and
- findings of the Peer Challenge Review commissioned by the Council (letter dated 7 November 2011).

The following measures are needed for you to comply with this Improvement Notice:

The Council must take action to:

- (i) improve areas of weakness identified in the Ofsted inspection reports dated 26 February 2010 and 16 February 2011 and ensure safeguarding and looked after children’s services meet all legislative and statutory guidance requirements; and
- (ii) put in place arrangements to sustain and build on the improvement secured.

In respect of the above the Council, working with their identified partners, must demonstrate evidence of improvement in outcomes by the following:

Social Care Practice

- ensuring sustained improvement in the quality and timeliness of assessments and ensuring all care plans comply with ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’, accurately record risk and protective factors, and the views of key agencies and the child or young person where appropriate to inform effective decision-making and planning. This should be measured and evidenced through regular case and supervision auditing;
- Reviewing and revising the Council’s quality assurance framework so that it meets the standards set out in statutory guidance and ensuring it is

implemented by all those in the Children's Service of the Council. The quality assurance framework must include regular auditing arrangements of case files with independent challenge and security to ensure the quality and timeliness of recording and compliance with recording standards; the frequency of which should be agreed by the Improvement Board. Regular reporting of the audits must be made available to the Improvement Board demonstrating how the Council have addressed any findings of these audits in order to maintain and to continue to improve the quality of social work practice;

- Ensuring effective supervision of social work practice in accordance with the Council's quality assurance framework with rigorous management oversight of social work practice and decision making on individual cases. Any identified strengths and areas for required development in social work practice which result from this rigorous management oversight of case files will be used to inform the quality of social care practice;
- Reviewing and developing a system that sets out thresholds and criteria for access to children's social care. Ensuring these thresholds and criteria are communicated, understood and applied consistently across all partner agencies;
- Developing a preventative and early help strategy to support meeting the emerging needs of children and their families, and increasing the quantity and effectiveness of common and locally agreed shared assessment processes (e.g. CAF) and ensure the Council is monitoring the use and impact of these by partner agencies;
- Ensuring that an implementation plan is in place for the Council's new integrated children's system (ICS) - Children's Assessment and Safeguarding System (CASS) and delivered on time;
- Ensuring the quality of case recording continues to take place prior to implementing CASS and ensuring the migration of all information from the legacy ICT systems is available within CASS by end of March 2012;
- Ensuring the Council presents regular updates on the development and implementation of CASS to the Improvement Board; such reports to include any issues which have occurred and what action has been taken to address them;

Capacity and Capability

- Developing and implementing an overall workforce strategy using information gathered from a "service need analysis", which provides clear evidence of impact in creating a capable, stable and sustainable workforce which requires fewer agency staff with a view to improving the quality of services within the Council;

- Reviewing social workers' responsibilities and workloads to ensure staff have a manageable range of work and a caseload consistent with their level of experience and competence. Ensuring the Improvement Board receives workforce management information to confirm that this is achieved and sustained;
- Developing and implementing a programme of induction, training and mentoring and continuous professional development for all social care staff and ensuring that staff have access to training and development opportunities that meet their needs and the needs of the service;
- Ensuring appropriate levels of administrative support and standards of office accommodation are available to ensure optimal utilisation of the social care workforce;

Partnership and Governance

- Ensuring the Council sets out a statement of their vision and ambition for children's services (with a clear set of objectives and timescales) by 31 March 2012. Ensuring this statement is communicated to and implemented by staff and partners such that they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in delivering this vision and ambition of the Council, and overall improvement;
- Putting in place a communications strategy, which includes mechanisms for listening to 'the voice of the child', families, staff and delivery partners;
- Developing a strategy for strengthening the leadership team across children's services which includes a plan for permanency, in structure and appointment of personnel, and effective lines of accountabilities to ensure an effective delivery of services;
- Developing and implementing a strategic plan to improve the support given to looked after children which should include: clear aspirational outcomes for each child or young person, development of practice to ensure placement matching is of a high standard and that placements are planned with the child or young person's involvement wherever possible; children experiencing fewer changes of social worker and placement and being able to tell the Council that they know their workers and are involved in their own care plan design; reducing the time taken between granting of placement orders and matching with adopters and the time between children starting to be looked after and placement for adoption;
- Putting in place systems that allow children and young people to develop a relationship with their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and actively engage with the planning, running and outcomes of reviews. All children will have a timely permanence plan which is achieved with purpose and pace;
- Increasing the use of clinical mental health advice, and in partnership with NHS partners, developing targets in respect of emotional and mental health

assessments as the basis for planning decisions and emotional health screening on entry to residential children's homes as part of placement planning;

- Developing and implementing specialist emotional health assessment tools suited to profile looked after children where social workers have concerns and to use this tool to assist in permanent placement decisions;
- Ensuring elected members of the Council understand and deliver their corporate parent role and are properly trained and supported to undertake a scrutiny role of Children and Family Services. This must include regular discussions with the Children in Care Council and regular reviews of management information to include consideration of the number of placements – including those more than 20 miles from the child or young person's ordinary residence, the number and outcome of health assessments, the number of children or young people who are adopted and the educational attainment and outcomes for the Council's looked after children;
- Ensuring that all elected members of the Council, and members of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) understand their responsibilities for and are accountable for improving the quality of children's services; ensuring there is close oversight and scrutiny in order to ensure that improvement in outcomes for children are being delivered;
- Establishing a clear remit for the Improvement Board, Children's Trust and the Local Safeguarding Children Board with clear governance, lines of accountability and specific roles of each body in driving forward improvement;

Support measures

Delivering improvement places additional pressures and higher expectations in terms of the performance of both senior officers and members. Therefore the Council must:

- Work with representatives of the Children's Improvement Board to formalise a package of sector support to address the issues set out in the inspections and peer review. The package of support should include peer mentoring arrangements for the Lead Member for Children's Services to support them in leading the change required, and peer challenge and scrutiny at the Improvement Board. A wider package of support may be considered subject to the direction of the Improvement Board.

Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice

With members of the Improvement Board, the Council must agree a dataset of performance targets with clear and realistic targets and timescales. Targets should be set at 6 and 12 month intervals. The Council must report to the Improvement Board on progress against these, and reporting must include analysis of performance trends that are failing to meet the targets and timescales set. The Council should aim for all targets to be met by 31 March 2013. The performance targets will form part of the discussion at the formal review meetings with the Department for Education.

We expect the Council to put in place an Improvement Board which shall have an Independent Chair and which we expect will meet every 2 months and include in its membership key partners and agencies. An official from the Department for Education will attend as an observer. The Improvement Board Chair should provide a written report on progress to the Minister at quarterly intervals.

The Improvement Plan should be developed with partners and agencies to carry out the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection reports of 26 February 2010 and 16 February 2011, the peer review and those set out in this Improvement Notice. This plan should be approved by the Improvement Board by the end of March 2012.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

The Chair of the Improvement Board must provide to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families a written, quarterly progress report including specific commentary against the targets set out in this Notice. Additional external validation of progress, such as a peer review, should be commissioned and carried out before the end of this Notice to inform decisions on next steps.

The progress reports from the Chair will inform reviews of progress which will take place after six and twelve months of this Improvement Notice and will be supplemented by a report on progress from the Leader of the Council. Such reviews may result in an amendment to this Improvement Notice and further action being required.

Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates may lead to:

The Secretary of State for Education using statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) directing the Council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the necessary and rapid improvements required in children's services.

Signed: **Date:**

Tim Loughton MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families