

Improvement Notice

To: Name **Medway Council (“the Council”)**
Address **Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent. ME4 4TR**

An Improvement Notice (the “first Improvement Notice”) was issued to Medway Council on 17 July 2013 due to inadequate performance identified in Children’s Social Care on the basis of evidence contained in the report of the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children carried out by Ofsted dated 15 February 2013 (“the inspection report”).

1. This new Notice is given to:

- (i) reflect progress made under the first Improvement Notice;
- (ii) address the areas for improvement identified in the report of the inspection of services for looked after children carried out by Ofsted of 23rd August 2013; and
- (iii) refocus the targets set out in the first Improvement Notice to ensure that the Council focuses on the areas for further improvement identified in the LGA peer review assessment (February, 2014) and the Independent Improvement Board Chair’s ‘Deep Dive’ (December, 2013).

The following measures are needed for the Council to comply with this Notice.

2. **The Council** must take action, working with its **partner agencies** (“partners”), to:

- (i) ensure that progress in the areas identified under the first Improvement Notice (July 2013) is maintained and the improvements made are embedded and sustained;
- (ii) deliver improvement in those areas of inadequate performance identified in the August 2013 Ofsted LAC inspection report; and
- (iii) focus on improving the areas for further improvement identified in the LGA peer review assessment and the Independent Improvement Board Chair’s ‘Deep Dive’.

In respect of the above, the Council, working with its partner as identified by the Council, must demonstrate evidence of improvement, and also take the following actions:

3. **Continue to improve the quality and consistency of assessments and practice** by ensuring that:

- (i) In relation to safeguarding:
 - o all assessments by the Council and partners follow the principles and

parameters of a good assessment, with robust analysis and are completed to the timescales in statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013'¹.

- information is shared in a timely and regular manner.
- (ii) In relation to children looked after and care leavers:
 - undertake robust, evidence based assessments of the changing needs of children looked after, to ensure care plans are responsive to need, kept up to date and reflect children and young people's views and experiences;
 - cases are progressed in a timely manner with effective management oversight and clear records of decision making and supporting rationale;
 - ensure the timely notification by social workers to the looked after children nurse of children becoming looked after so initial and review health assessments are timely with sharing of information about children's health care needs;
 - ensure initial health assessments for looked after children are completed within statutory timescales and provide timely completion of health histories to assist care leavers in their transition; and
 - develop and use quality personal education plans for looked after children, which narrow education and training gaps and work to clear objectives.
- (iii) Qualitative and quantitative evidence arising from performance management systems confirm this has been carried out made a difference to the lives of children who are looked after.

3. Improve the quality of child protection conferences and the effective delivery and management of child in need and child protection plans by ensuring:

- attendance by relevant professionals at child protection conferences is achieved regularly;
- child protection plans demonstrate compliance with the requirements of 'Working Together'. Plans should set out the actions that must be taken including reasons for those actions, who is responsible for each action with clear timescales for the outcomes to be achieved and clear actions should outcomes not be achieved;
- further embedding of the system of risk assessment which is applied to all child in need, child protection and care plans to ensure consistent judgements are made about the levels of risk;
- child in need and child protection plans are shared with other professionals, the parent/carers and where appropriate, the child or young person;
- that review points are agreed with other professionals, the child and the family, to evaluate the impact of any change on the welfare of the child;
- qualitative and quantitative evidence arising from performance management systems confirm this has made a difference to keeping children and young people safe.

4. Strengthen the voice of the child by ensuring:

¹ Statutory Guidance: 'Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children'

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00305-2010>

- the views of children and young people, and their experiences are recorded on case files and used to inform individual care plans and service development;
 - that regular reporting to the LSCB is established to ensure they hear the views and experience of children²; and
 - qualitative and quantitative evidence arising from performance management systems confirm this has been carried out and children say they feel listened to, heard and that their views have been taken into account.
5. **Fully implement and embed the new early help strategy** to enable families and partners to understand the continuum of need and pathways into statutory services. This includes:
- ensuring the early help strategy is effective, owned and understood by partners, and the proposed Early Help Service is put in place;
 - implementing a commissioning plan for targeted services in a co-ordinated way for children and families, informed by shared partnership needs data, which will include a monitoring framework to record use and impact of these services;
 - developing and agreeing a local protocol for the use of early help assessment as set out in Working Together 2013; and
 - reviewing and monitoring the use of the early help assessment and reporting regularly to the MSCB on its effectiveness.
6. **Improve quality and consistency of care planning and commissioning for children in care and care leavers.** This includes:
- improving the sufficiency of a range of services to respond to individual need;
 - fully implementing the planned 18+ Leaving Care service;
 - working with partners to extend accommodation, education, training and employment opportunities for young people leaving care;
 - monitoring and reporting on young people NEET; and
 - ensuring that an appropriate CAMH service is commissioned for looked after children and care leavers to support their emotional health and wellbeing.
7. **Strengthen the MSCB (Medway Safeguarding Children’s Board).** This includes:
- building capacity to provide high levels of support and challenge in engaging and holding partners to account for their contributions to early help, children in need and child protection, and the effectiveness of contributions and their partnerships;
 - ensuring there is a shared understanding and application of thresholds with partners for meeting statutory assessments and continue to review and monitor the use of thresholds and criteria to ensure their sustained effectiveness; and
 - ensuring the MSCB improves communication about its role and responsibilities and better holds the system to account accordingly.
8. **Establish and use a new quality assurance framework** which must:

² Children’s Safeguarding Performance Information Framework (published 12 June 2012)

- maintain a focus on both quantitative and qualitative evidence;
- give consideration to the experience of the child and family and their journey through the system including regular qualitative auditing of case records;
- support the quality and timeliness of recording and compliance with regulations in individual case records; and
- include a programme of multi-agency case audit, and regular reports on the findings to the Improvement Board and the MSCB, based on what is known to constitute best practice and which uses the learning from analysis to inform continual improvements in practice as well as inform workforce development, supervision and future service development.

9. Continue to secure the aims of the Workforce Strategy to consolidate and sustains improvements in developing the workforce:

- maintain a continued emphasis on stabilising the workforce by reducing the levels of vacancies and use of agency staff so children experience consistent relationships;
- continue to support the professional development of social workers, front line social care professionals and their managers;
- continue to develop and embed reflective supervision;
- continue to maintain social workers caseloads at a level where they can undertake their professional role; and
- ensure social workers have the support from administration, electronic systems and office space to focus on social work tasks.

10. Ensure effective leadership, scrutiny and challenge continue direct and shape the quality and effectiveness of safeguarding and looked after services. Ensure the following are sustained after improvements have been made:

- continued focus on a culture of accountability with managers, staff and partners holding each other to account with action taken when required to challenge poor and unacceptable performance;
- elected members of the Council maintain, improve on and deliver their corporate parent role for looked after children and support the Council to meet all the statutory requirements, including statutory visits;
- effective assurance arrangements are in place within the Council and across the partnership in line with DfE statutory guidance ‘roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services and the Lead Member for Children Services’³ and ‘Working Together’; and
- the ambition for children and young people across Medway is endorsed and promoted in practice throughout the Council and across the partnership supported by strengthened communications.

Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice the Council is expected to:

11. Continue to support the Improvement Board and its Independent Chair (“the Chair”). The Board is expected to meet at least every month. If in the future the Board wishes to vary the frequency of meetings this must first be agreed by the Department for Education. An official from the Department for Education will

³ <http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00223224/guidance-for-director-and-lead-member-childrens-services>

attend Board meetings as a participant observer. The Board should include key partner agencies in its membership. The Council must provide the Chair with administrative support to a level sufficient for the Chair to undertake their role efficiently and for the Board to operate effectively.

12. The Council must ensure that the content of the Improvement Plan is revised to reflect the recommendations from this new notice and that the vision and ambition is communicated to and implemented by staff and partners such that they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are held to account in delivering this vision and ambition of the Council, and overall improvement. 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 actions included in the revised plan to be delivered within 18 months of the LAC inspection.** The performance targets will form part of the discussion at the formal review meetings with the Department for Education.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

13. The Board Chair must provide to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families a written 3 monthly report against the targets set out in this Notice. The Chair of the MSCB should provide a 3 monthly report to the Improvement Board and Chair and update on the activity MSCB has undertaken to meet its functions. The Improvement Board Chair should assess the MSCB update within the report to the Minister. The next external validation of progress should take place no later than September 2014 and focus on services for looked after children, with a report to the Department for Education no later than end of October 2014.
14. Progress reviews will be conducted by Department for Education officials and take place every six months until this Notice is lifted, or at the specific request of the Department. Prior to the review any Improvement Board Chair's report for that period will be supplemented by a report on progress from the Lead Member for Children's Services. 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:

15. Should the Council be unwilling or unable to comply with this Improvement Notice, or should ministers not be satisfied with the Council's progress at any stage, ministers may choose to invoke their statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) to direct the Council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the improvements required in children's services.

Signed:  Date: 21st May 2014

Edward Timpson MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families