

To: Name London Borough of Bexley (“the Council”)
Address Civic Offices, 2 Watling Street, Bexleyheath, DA6 7AT

This Improvement Notice (“the Notice”) is being issued due to insufficient progress in:

Delivering Children’s Services

on the basis of evidence contained in:

- the report of the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, and review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding children board (LSCB), carried out by Ofsted dated 23 May 2014 (“the Ofsted inspection report”) which judged the overall effectiveness of the Council’s safeguarding services to ‘require improvement’ and the effectiveness of the LSCB as ‘inadequate’.

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

The Council must take action to:

- (i) improve areas of weakness identified in the Ofsted inspection report and ensure child protection and looked after children’s services meet all legislative requirements;
- (ii) put in place arrangements to sustain and build on the improvement secured.

In respect of the above the Council, working with its partner agencies, as identified by the Council, (“the Council’s partners”) must demonstrate evidence of improvement in outcomes as follows:

Quality and effectiveness of safeguarding practice

1. Increase the pace of work to secure sustained improvements in the quality and consistency of assessments, by taking account of the safeguarding risks to the children and young people and ensuring their views are recorded, and meet the requirements of Working Together 2013.

Achieving timely permanence

2. Embed and sustain focus on securing timely permanent placements for looked after children. This includes fully implementing the adoption action plan

and securing improvements in the adoption scorecard timeliness measures. Evidence must be provided of early permanency planning for all children so that children do not wait to secure their permanent placements. This includes utilising the full range of options available to the Local Authority including Special Guardianship and permanently matched foster care.

3. The Improvement Board should monitor the progress of this work, which should lead to better placement outcomes for children in Bexley, and sustain the progress made with increased adoption and special guardianship placements.

Capacity and Capability

4. Ensure the development of an effective, sustainable workforce strategy which is based upon an analysis of training needs and informed by a demographic and service needs analysis. Increase the pace on developing a workforce strategy which must include clear recruitment and retention strategies, with a focus on stabilising the workforce to secure high quality services to children and families in Bexley.

5. Strengthen the senior leadership team across children's services through the recruitment of a permanent Director of Children's services, with clear lines in accountabilities to ensure effective delivery of services. The Improvement Board should monitor the arrangements for the timely implementation of such plans.

Improving the effectiveness of partnership and governance

6. Ensure the LSCB fulfils its statutory duties for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in Bexley, and ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each of the partners in this respect. The Improvement Board must ensure that governance arrangements within the board and other key strategic bodies are clearly described and understood, so that all agencies are able to fulfil their statutory responsibilities.

7. Ensure the LSCB work programme is implemented and monitored and all agencies are held to account for delivering their contribution to the vision and ambition of the Council and overall improvement. The Improvement Board must ensure that plans are implemented to agreed timescales.

8. Multi-agency audits must be undertaken by the LSCB, and be supported by robust data, so that trends, issues and implications for multi-agency safeguarding practices are fully assessed by the Improvement Board. The Improvement Board should ensure that any actions that arise as a result of these audits are completed by the LSCB.

9. Arrange for an independent, external review of the LSCB progress, within 12 months of the date of this notice; report the results to the Improvement Board; and ensure the LSCB to act promptly on any recommendations.

Improvement Support

10. Delivering improvement places additional pressures and higher expectations in terms of the performance of both senior officers and members. Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice, we expect the Council to:

11. Continue to support the Improvement Board and its Independent Chair ("the Chair"). The Board is expected to meet every 2 months. If in the future the Improvement Board wishes to vary the frequency of meetings this must first be agreed by the Department for Education. As previously, the Improvement Board should include in its membership the Council's partners. An official from the Department for Education will attend as a participant observer.

12. Continue to provide the Chair with administrative support to a level sufficient to for the Chair to undertake their role efficiently and for the Board to operate effectively.

Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice

13. An Improvement Plan should be developed by the Improvement Board with the Council's partners to carry out the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection report of May 2014 and those 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. 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 up to twelve months from the start of this Notice. 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:

14. The Board Chair must provide to the Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Children and Families with written reports including specific commentary against the targets set out in this Notice at six monthly intervals from the date of this notice. The Board Chair must also provide an initial report 2 months after the commencement of this Notice.

15. The progress reports from the Board Chair will inform reviews of progress which will be conducted by Department for Education officials and take place after six and 12 months from the publication of the Ofsted inspection report which took place in May 2014, or at the specific request of the Department.

16. The external validation of the effectiveness of the LSCB will inform next steps. Should an Ofsted inspection of the Local Authority occur before the

external validation is complete, the outcome will also inform progress and decisions on next steps.

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

17. 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: *2nd September 2014*

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