

Improvement Notice

To: NAME Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (“the Council”)
ADDRESS Archway Road, Knowsley L36 9YU

This Improvement Notice is issued to Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council on 16 September 2014 following the findings of inadequate performance and arrangements for ‘children who need help and protection’, for ‘adoption performance’ ‘leadership, management and governance’, and for ‘effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board’ as identified in the Ofsted inspection report published 30 June 2014.

1. This Notice is given to address all the areas for improvement identified 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 published by Ofsted on 30 June 2014.
2. To comply with this Notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with its partner agencies (“partners”) as identified by the Children Act 2004 (section 11), with clear evidence of improvement:

Understanding needs of children, young people and families

3. **Ensure that the needs of children and young people in Knowsley are reviewed and there is a clear statement of what children and young people can expect from services provided by social care and partners** by:
 - a. reviewing the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis and communicating a shared understanding of strategic priorities to staff and partners; with a clear focus on vulnerable groups who would benefit from help and protection, care and adoption.
 - b. setting out a process map of the children and family journey through the system including key transition points and target performance indicators;
 - c. ensuring the views of children and young people, their experiences and needs are gathered to inform individual care plans, the commissioning of services, improvements to services and that there is a system to record and report to the Local Safeguarding Children Board, the Improvement Board and children and families;
 - d. ensuring that children and young people are seen alone during statutory visits and their views recorded;

- e. ensuring social worker's report on child protection are shared with the family 24hrs before conferences; and
- f. ensuring that children and young people are provided with information about entitlements and how to complain.

Leadership, Management and Governance

- 4. **Ensure the Council sets out a statement of their vision and ambition** for children's services and an improvement plan ('the Improvement Plan') which sets clear objectives, timescales, outcomes and is supported by a data set including qualitative and quantitative information against performance indicators by 6 October 2014. Consideration should be given to, but not limited by, the *Children's Safeguarding Performance Information Framework 2012*. The statement and Improvement Plan should be communicated to and implemented by all staff including those in partner agencies. The Improvement Board ('the Board') is accountable for delivering the Improvement Plan.
- 5. **Ensure leadership, scrutiny and challenge is exercised** and impacts on the quality and effectiveness of safeguarding and looked after children services. By ensuring that:
 - a. effective assurance arrangements are in place within the Council and across the partnership in line with Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance *'Roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children Services'* and *'Working Together to Safeguard Children'*;
 - b. elected members of the Council understand and deliver their corporate parent role for looked after children and meet all the statutory requirements, including statutory visits;
 - c. the lead member is supported by an experienced peer with a successful track record of providing political leadership in a Council that has gone through significant improvement following an inspection;
 - d. Council senior managers continue to consult staff and partners on the changes necessary to secure improved children services and that there is sufficient capacity to enable senior managers to implement the improvement activity and measure impact;
 - e. a culture of accountability is developed with managers, staff and partners holding each other to account with action taken when required to challenge poor and unacceptable performance; and
 - f. children's social care is represented on all key planning forums such as the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Early Help and Partnership Working

- 6. **Implement a prevention and early intervention strategy to provide children, young people and families appropriate support from early help to statutory intervention** by:
 - a. setting clear expectations that partners in health and the police play

- a full and active role in the identification and support of those who need early help and protection;
- b. developing and agreeing a local protocol for early assessment as set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* so all partners are able to respond to early needs and involve others as required;
- c. reviewing and monitoring the understanding, use of thresholds and criteria, and referral routes (including the take-up of CAF) by different partners;
- d. monitoring referral/re-referral rates and feedback from referrers;
- e. commissioning targeted services with partners with mechanisms for step-up/step-down between early help and statutory social care to ensure appropriate support and shared case leads across partners; and
- f. monitoring the contributions to, the use and impact of early help as made by all partners and to regularly report to the Board on this with recommendations to improve practice.

Quality and effectiveness of Practice

7. Improve the quality, timeliness and consistency of children's social care assessments by ensuring that:

- a. all assessments by the Council and partners follow the principles and parameters of a good assessment and are completed within timescales as stated in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*;
- b. all protocols are agreed and monitored and ensure information is shared in a timely fashion e.g. after key planning meetings where decisions are taken; and
- c. evidence, rationale and decision making for assessments are timely in being recorded.

8. Improve the quality, delivery and management of child protection practice and plans by ensuring that:

- a. all partners attend child protection meetings and strategy meetings and this is escalated and addressed when not occurring;
- b. child protection plans comply with the requirements of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* including ensuring that all plans include the views of the child, time bound actions, with assigned 'owners', and with measurable, success outcomes for children and young people;
- c. plans include review and evaluation points, with timescales agreed with other professionals along with information about their contributions;
- d. scrutiny, challenge and capability of Child Protection Conference Chairs is improved by having regard to statutory guidance;
- e. case records are regularly updated, in a timely fashion, to document any new or amended information, rationale and decisions as they arise; and
- f. evidence of management oversight, decision making and

appropriate action and chronologies, is set out in detail on each case file.

9. Ensure robust permanency, care planning and review of looked after children at the earliest point by :

- a. improving matching processes to ensure that the needs of children requiring long term placements are met;
- b. implementing a care planning tracker that is subject to regular review;
- c. clear systems are in place to ensure concurrent and parallel planning for children entering care;
- d. reviewing the procedures of the Independent Reviewing Officers to adhere to statutory guidance and to tackle any delays to the timescales set out in plans;
- e. ensuring there are sufficient foster carers and residential placements to respond to the needs of looked after children; and
- f. monitoring the educational achievement of looked after children against clear targets.

10. Improve the timeliness of adoptions by ensuring that:

- a. clear plans are in place to improve all aspects of adoption timeliness (local authority decision-making, placement orders, matching and placement);
- b. measures are taken to build on the introduction of recent new processes to address delays including the production of robust performance management information; and
- c. performance management information and a trajectory of likely impact on DfE's adoption scorecard indicators is reported and reviewed by the Board as part of the data set in paragraph 4.

Quality assurance, audit and management oversight

11. Ensure there is a robust and effective quality assurance framework to drive and evidence the impact of improvement with families, front line practitioners and key partner agencies that:

- a. uses quantitative and qualitative evidence, with a view to the effectiveness of practice and the degree to which it is safe;
- b. includes regular auditing arrangements of case files, with use of independent arrangements to review the quality and timeliness of recording and compliance in individual case records (as set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*);
- c. there is an agreed regular and planned approach (including the size and scope of audits), to update the Board on audit findings and analysis, along with recommendations to improve practice, which should also inform the work of the LSCB; and
- d. ensures recommendations and actions are measurable, inform improvements in practice, workforce development and supervision.

12. Establish effective supervision and management oversight by

ensuring that:

- a. all staff continue to have regular supervision;
- b. that supervision is reflective to promote learning, in line with agreed protocols, with training available for supervisors;
- c. social worker responsibilities and workloads are defined and reviewed with a range of work for staff consistent with their level of experience and competence (including protected caseloads for Newly Qualified Social Workers); and
- d. all management oversight (such as case discussion, supervision and audit) is conducted in line with standards set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* to ensure safe practice and decision making on individual child protection cases.

Staff capability and capacity

13. Develop a **workforce strategy** which is based upon an analysis of need. The workforce strategy must include clear recruitment and retention strategies, set out how poor performance and capability issues will be dealt with and an analysis of skills and training needs required to deliver good social work. It should be implicitly linked to the Improvement Plan, and clearly related to service plans and audit outcomes. The strategy should be aimed initially at reducing the dependency on agency staff and should include:

- a. support for newly qualified social workers is reviewed to ensure that it meets need and results in them becoming advocates for the service in Knowsley;
- b. a review of, and improvement to, tools and systems required to deliver good and agile social work including the electronic information system; and
- c. staff engagement and regular feedback to improve and shape practice using feedback mechanisms, such as staff surveys and report the results to the Improvement Board.

Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB)

14. **Strengthen the LSCB so it can ensure that partners work together effectively and are held to account for their responsibilities** by ensuring that:

- a. there is action to improve the effectiveness of the LSCB, to ensure its compliance with the requirements of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and that partners are fulfilling their obligations under section 11 of the Children Act 2004;
- b. multi-agency practice and individual partner audits are robust, with reporting to the Improvement Board on any key lessons and recommendations to improve practice;
- c. all partners are committed a shared set of priorities for safeguarding, child protection, and early help/intervention and

- prevention;
- d. all policies and training are reviewed and delivered to ensure understanding of thresholds in all agencies;
 - e. the LSCB learns from national lessons of serious case reviews and from LSCBs where effectiveness is considered good or outstanding; and
 - f. the chair of the LSCB reports progress to the Improvement Board meeting to inform the Improvement Board Chair's report to the Minister.

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

- a. Establish an Improvement Board ('the Board') and appoint an Independent Chair ("the Chair"). The Board is expected to meet at least every 6 weeks. If in the future the Improvement 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 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 his/her role efficiently and for the Board to operate effectively. This to include provision to allow, at least 2 days every month for independent testing and validation.(either by the Chair directly or an independently appointed person on behalf of the Chair).
- b. The Council must develop an Improvement Plan by 6 October 2014 aimed at delivering improvements. The content of the Improvement Plan and a record of progress must be kept up to date. The Council must report to the Board on progress against the objectives in the plan and can commission updates from partners in order to do this. Reporting should include analysis and recommendations supported by reviewing performance trends against key data sets (which partners should agree) including quality of service and outcomes for children and young people. The Council should highlight those objectives which are slow to progress and highlight where contributions need to be strengthened.

16. The Council should aim for actions included in the Improvement Plan to be delivered within 18 months of the Ofsted inspection. The objectives and performance trends will form part of the discussion at formal review meetings with the Department for Education.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

- 17. The Improvement Board Chair must provide to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families a written progress report against the areas set out in this Notice by December 2014 and every three improvement boards thereafter. The Chair's report should be based on

independent testing and validation of improvements.

18. In parallel, the LSCB Chair should also report to the Improvement Board meeting on progress to improve its effectiveness.
19. Progress reviews will be conducted by DfE 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 Council report of progress against the improvement plan submitted to DfE a week in advance of the review. 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 or poor progress:

20. 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 on behalf of the Secretary of State



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Dated : 16 September 2014