

STATUTORY DIRECTION TO CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL IN RELATION TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES UNDER SECTION 497A(4B) OF THE EDUCATION ACT 1996

WHEREAS:

1. The Secretary of State for Education ("the Secretary of State") has noted in respect of Cumbria County Council ("the Council") that following earlier 'inadequate' judgements for arrangements for the protection of children (following an inspection in May 2013) and for safeguarding (May 2012), performance in respect of services for looked after children has declined from 'adequate' in May 2012 to 'inadequate' as detailed in Ofsted's inspection report of 13 May 2015 ("the 2015 Ofsted report").
2. The Council's failure to put in place effective improvement plans to address the weaknesses identified by Ofsted in 2012 and 2013 led the Secretary of State to issue an improvement notice in August 2012, and later January 2014, requiring the Council to take a number of steps to improve the quality of services.
3. The Secretary of State has carefully considered the 2015 Ofsted report which found the Council's delivery of children services, particularly in relation to children looked after, to be 'inadequate'. Leadership, management and governance in the Council were also judged to be 'inadequate'.
4. The Secretary of State, having considered representations made by the Council, considers it expedient, in accordance with her powers under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996, to direct the Council as set out below in order to ensure that all of the Council's children's social care functions are performed to an adequate standard.

NOW THEREFORE:

5. Pursuant to section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996, the Secretary of State directs the Council as follows:
 - a. To appoint Claire Burgess (Director, Burgess Consultancy Limited) as independent chair of the Cumbria Children's Services Improvement Board and to ensure that the Board meets on a monthly basis.
 - b. To ensure there is a robust improvement plan which spans children's services, and an effective reporting system which enables progress and outcomes to be measured. Progress is to be reported to each meeting of the Children's Services Improvement Board.
 - c. To include in the improvement plan clear and specific actions which

reflect the journey of the child and which are designed to improve: the quality of services for looked after children; permanency planning (including adoption services); and services for care leavers.

- d. To commission the Local Government Association to undertake a diagnostic assessment of looked after children services, to be completed by 31 December 2015. The report is to be shared with the Department for Education.
- e. To work with partners and the Local Safeguarding Children Board to ensure that there is a consistent understanding and application of thresholds for children's social care.
- f. To take action to ensure that the Council delivers an effective Independent Reviewing Officer service which meets statutory requirements and which contributes effectively to quality assurance and practice.
- g. As part of its planned restructure, to ensure that strong management oversight and supervision support improvement in the quality of decision-making and in the quality of practice.
- h. To implement a performance management and quality assurance framework, to be approved by Claire Burgess, that supports learning and development and practice improvement, in particular to improve case recording and ensure that reasons for decisions are clear; that decisions are based on up to date risk assessments; and that care plans are up to date.
- i. To take steps to strengthen leadership capacity within children's social care services, including by making better use of external sources of support and putting in place mentoring arrangements for those in key leadership roles.
- j. To put in place a robust workforce strategy which aims to ensure that the service is appropriately staffed at practitioner, manager and leadership levels and that the learning and development opportunities provide staff at all levels with the skills and knowledge they need to operate effectively.
- k. To co-operate with the Chair of the Children's Services Improvement Board and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board in their reports to the Department for Education on progress against the Council's improvement plan.

6. This direction will remain in force until it is revoked by the Secretary of State.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lunn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning.

SUZANNE LUNN
A Senior Civil Servant in the Department for Education

Dated this 9th day of November 2015