

Improvement Notice

To: NAME Leicester City Council (“the Council”)
ADDRESS City Hall, Leicester, LE1 1FQ

This Improvement Notice is issued to Leicester City Council on 22 December 2015 following the findings of inadequate performance and arrangements for ‘children who need help and protection’, for ‘leadership, management and governance’, and for ‘effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board’ as identified in the Ofsted inspection report published 20 March 2015.

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 20 March 2015.
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:

Improvement board and independent chair

3. The established improvement board and independent chair (“the chair”) arrangements currently in place should be maintained.
 - a. The board is expected to meet at least every 4 weeks. If in the future the board wishes to vary the frequency of meetings this must first be agreed by the Department for Education.
 - b. An official or an adviser from the Department for Education (“the Department”) will attend board meetings as a ‘participant observer’, where appropriate.
 - c. The board should always include key partner agencies in its membership.
 - d. The Council must provide the chair with administrative support to a level sufficient for the chair to undertake the role efficiently and for the board to operate effectively. This should include provision to allow at least 2 days every month for independent testing and validation of improvement or capacity to improve – by the chair directly or an independently appointed person on by the chair.

Adviser arrangements

4. The Secretary of State has chosen to appoint a person or persons to provide advice to the Department and/or the Council. The Council will work with the adviser until some such time that the Secretary of State is satisfied this is no longer required.

Improvement plan

5. The Council's improvement plan will deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement. The plan should cover the areas identified in the Ofsted 2015 report and pay particular attention to:
 - a. Understanding the needs of children, young people, and families. Those needs should be reviewed, and a clear statement of provision and expectation should be delivered.
 - b. Implementing an effective prevention and early intervention strategy that provides children, young people, and families with appropriate support from early help to statutory intervention.
 - c. Improving the quality, delivery, and management of child protection practice and plans.
 - d. Delivering a robust and effective quality assurance framework to drive improvement that evidences impact on families, practitioners, and partner agencies.
 - e. Setting out a clear and achievable recruitment and retention strategy to deliver a stable and sustainable social work workforce.

6. To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:
 - a. The content of the improvement plan and a record of progress against it must be kept up to date.
 - b. The Council must report to the improvement board on progress against the objectives in the plan and can commission updates from partners in order to do this.
 - c. A comprehensive and accurate data set that is regularly communicated and understood by all levels of the Council to ensure that data better informs practice and provision in children's services will be developed and delivered.
 - d. Reporting should include analysis and recommendations supported by performance trends against key data sets including the quality of service and outcomes for children and young people.
 - e. The Council should highlight those objectives which are slow to progress and highlight where contributions need to be strengthened.
 - f. The views of frontline staff, and children and young people will be taken into consideration in the development of practice and standards.

Department for Education reviews

7. Officials or advisers from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the improvement agenda at least every six months and more regularly where appropriate.
8. These reviews may cover, but are not exclusive to: culture; performance; leadership, management, and governance; workforce and management oversight; early help; and the LSCB.
9. The Council should provide:
 - a. Time with staff and leadership;
 - b. Accurate and up to date data on performance and quality;
 - c. Facilities to carry out the reviews;
10. Prior to the Department's reviews, the Council should provide its own assessment of the shift in organisational culture in its children's services provision. This may include, but is not exclusive to:
 - a. Progress against the improvement plan objectives;
 - b. Staff surveys;
 - c. Staff supervision and the quality of feedback.
11. Alongside an organisational culture report, the Director of Children's Services should submit to the Department an assessment of the last six months of work, highlighting successes and areas where further development and reform is required.

Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB)

12. The LSCB must be strengthened 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 to a shared set of priorities for safeguarding; child protection; early help; intervention; and prevention;
 - d. all policies and training are reviewed and delivered to ensure understanding of thresholds (the criteria and level of need for when a case should be referred to local authority children's social care) in all agencies;

- e. the LSCB learns from national lessons of serious case reviews and from LSCBs where effectiveness is considered good or outstanding;
- f. the chair of the LSCB reports progress to the improvement board meeting to inform the improvement board chair's report to the Minister.

13. Taking account of the measures set out in this improvement notice the Council should aim for actions included in the improvement plan to be delivered within 18 months of the Ofsted inspection.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

14. The improvement board chair must provide a written progress report against: the areas set out in this notice; improvement against the Ofsted requirements; and any other such information pertinent to the improvement journey, to the Minister of State for Children and Families at six monthly intervals from the date of this improvement notice. The chair's report should be based on independent testing and validation of improvement.

15. In parallel, the LSCB chair should also report to the Improvement Board meeting on progress to improve its effectiveness.

16. The adviser will provide regular communication and reporting to the Department to help assess improvement and to highlight areas of both good practice and concern.

17. Progress reviews will be conducted periodically by Department for Education officials. Prior to reviews, any improvement board chair's report for that period will be supplemented by a Council report of progress against the improvement plan submitted to the Department a week in advance of the review. Such reviews may result in an amendment to this improvement notice and further action being undertaken.

Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates or poor progress:

18. 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 as amended) to direct the Council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the improvements required in children's services.

Signed:  Date: 22/12/15

SUZANNE LUNN

A senior civil servant in the Department for Education