

Improvement Notice

To: Name WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL
Address County Hall, West Street, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1RQ

This Improvement Notice is being issued due to poor performance in:

Children's social care services

on the basis of evidence contained in:

the report of the inspection of safeguarding and looked after children's services carried out by Ofsted and CQC (published December 2010) which judged the overall effectiveness and capacity for improvement of West Sussex's safeguarding services to be 'inadequate'.

The following measure(s) are needed for you to comply with this Improvement Notice:

The Council must take action to:

- (i) put in place robust arrangements to sustain and build on the improvements secured; and
- (ii) improve the areas of weakness identified in the Ofsted inspection report having regard to the recommendations contained therein.

In respect of (ii) above the Council must demonstrate evidence of improvement in outcomes by:

Social Care Practice

- Reviewing and developing a system to ensure that the Council's thresholds for access to children's social care are communicated to all Partners and agencies of the Council and to ensure that those thresholds are applied consistently by all Partners and agencies across the County;
- Ensuring the Council improves the responsiveness and quality of assessments and child protection investigations improve and meet the standards set out in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010', addressing delays in responding to referrals and that in all cases; referrers are informed of the outcome of all their referrals;
- Ensuring that children in need receive a timely service, minimising risk,

by improving the percentage of initial and core assessments carried out within the timescales set out in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010' from the 2009-10 baseline of 56.3% (in 10 days) and 60.4% respectively to be in line with at least national averages for each;

- Ensuring assessments are undertaken by qualified social workers. Assessments should contain a level of detailed analysis as set out in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010' and include the views of children and young people, their parents/carers and other agencies;
- Reviewing and - using the Framework-i auditing tool - implementing auditing arrangements within a quality assurance framework including multi agency audits to inform improvements to the overall quality and consistency of casework. The frequency of the auditing process should be agreed by the Improvement Board. The LSCB chair should report to the Improvement Board on the development and delivery of multi agency audits. The review process must include an element of peer or external evaluation;
- Improving the quality of reports and planning overall but in particular in relation to CIN and child protection plans which need to include any identified risks; paying particular attention to ensuring that during the period of 2011-12, the percentage of those children who become subject to a child protection plan who do so for a second or subsequent time reduces to the statistical neighbour average;
- Reporting progress on the implementation of the new ICS system and the extent to which it is effectively supporting social workers. Where issues are raised demonstrating that action has been taken to address them;
- Ensuring that there is sufficient capacity and capability within children's social care. By utilising the Health Check developed by the Social Work Task Force, ensure that caseloads, and workloads generally are manageable and that no staff across the service carry too heavy caseload. Progress with the implementation of the Health Check should be reported to the Improvement Board through the Performance Challenge meeting along with caseloads across different service areas. The latter should focus on what progress is being made to address the inconsistency between the three areas of the county in terms of staff workloads as identified in the Ofsted report;
- Reviewing management oversight, decision making and supervision putting in place measures to support the development of frontline managers to effectively oversee continual improvements in social work practice.

Partnership and Governance

- Reviewing the membership, structure and operation of the West Sussex's Local Safeguarding Children Board within the next three months to ensure that the board offers offer rigorous scrutiny,

monitoring, challenge and strategic direction in relation to services and outcomes for vulnerable children and meets all statutory requirements as set out in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010';

- Establishing clear remits for the Improvement Board, Children's Trust and the West Sussex Local Safeguarding Children Board so partners are aware of the overall governance and specific roles of each in driving forward improvement; and
- Working with senior representatives from health, police, schools and voluntary sector to support the LSCB through providing it with the information it requires to undertake an effective role and actively encouraging staff to attend LSCB training events.

Support measures

Improvement in these circumstances places additional pressures and higher expectations in terms of the performance of both senior officers and members. Therefore the Council must:

- Ensure that within two months a vision for improving children's services to support delivery of the improvement plan is developed jointly by members and officers (the mechanism for this might be joint officer and member workshop(s));
- Establish peer mentoring arrangements for the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services and his leadership team to support them in leading the change required. A further package of peer support for managers and front line staff may be considered subject to the direction of the Improvement Board; and
- Put in place scrutiny arrangements to allow Members, to scrutinise and challenge social care practice once the necessary improvements have been made.

We expect the Council to put in place an Improvement Board which shall have an Independent Chair and which we expect will meet once a month and include in its membership key partners and agencies. An official from the Department for Education will attend as an observer. An improvement programme will be developed to carry out the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection report and those specifically highlighted in this Improvement Notice. This programme should be agreed with all key partners and agencies and the Improvement Board within one month of the issue of this notice and should then be submitted to the Minister of State for Children and Families for her agreement. We would expect the Council to agree with and provide the Independent Chair with such support as they need to carry out their role and that the Council should consider where further support and challenge might be sourced from the local government sector.

To support the work of the Improvement Board we expect the Council to

arrange monthly Performance Challenge meetings which will focus on reviewing key performance data and management information as agreed with officials from the Department for Education. These meetings should be chaired by the Chief Executive and should include the Improvement Board Chair, the Director of Children's Services and any other key officers the Council sees fit. A report from these meetings should be tabled at each meeting of the Improvement Board.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

Quarterly reporting by the Chair of the Improvement Board to the Minister of State for Children and Families at the Department for Education and the Leader of West Sussex Council including specific commentary against the targets set out in this notice. Additional external validation of progress, such as a peer review, should be commissioned and carried out before the end of this notice to inform decisions on next steps.

Formal reviews of progress will take place after six and twelve months with a final review planned at the end of September 2012. Such reviews may result in further action being required.

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

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: 15/3/11