

Improvement Notice

To: Name **Cambridgeshire County Council (“the Council”)**

Address **Shire Hall, Castle Hill, Cambridge, CB30AP**

This Improvement Notice (“the Notice”) is being issued due to poor performance in Children’s Services on the basis of evidence contained in:

- the report of the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children carried out by Ofsted dated 19th October (“the inspection report”) which judged the overall effectiveness of the Council’s safeguarding services 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 safeguarding and looked after children’s services meet all legislative requirements; and
- (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 by the following:

Quality and effectiveness of safeguarding practice

- **To improve the quality and consistency of initial and core assessments** by ensuring:
 - all assessments by the Council and partners are carried out using the “*Conceptual Framework*”¹ so that evidence is analysed in a systematic way in order to determine the level of risk faced by the individual child or young person and informs plans;
 - the parent, child or young person’s views are recorded, where this is appropriate;
 - all assessments are completed to the timescales and inform decision making and planning set out in statutory guidance

¹ “The Conceptual Framework for Thinking about Risk Assessment and Case Management in Child Protective Service” as described in Statutory guidance ‘The Framework for The Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families’
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Framework%20for%20the%20assessment%20of%20children%20in%20need%20and%20their%20families.pdf>

- *'Working Together'*²; and
 - qualitative evidence arising from performance management systems and case audits confirms that this has been carried out satisfactorily.
- Ensure that recording is of a standard to meet the Ofsted "good" grading criteria and is coherent, timely, reflects the work undertaken, is clear about the reasons for decisions, including the decisions not to take actions, and includes an up to date case chronology.
- In doing so, the views of children and young people, their experiences and needs are recorded on their case files and used to inform their individual care plans and the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. To support this work regard must be had to the Children's Safeguarding Performance Information Framework (published 12 June 2012).
- Ensure that the workforce steering group task and finish group gives appropriate priority and focus to improving the quality of recording.
- **Improve the quality, delivery and management of child protection and children in need plans** by ensuring that all plans comply with *'Working Together'* including ensuring that all plans set out the actions that must be taken and by whom and the outcomes to be achieved with timescales.
- Ensuring that evidence of appropriate oversight of case work and decision making is set out in detail on each case file and information arising from case audits confirms that all actions have been carried out in accordance with statutory guidance.
- Review the performance management framework supported by themed audits to ensure robust monitoring of social work practice which is compliant with current guidance and which drives improved and consistent practice.
- Ensure that the quality assurance audits are carried out and the performance information and evidence from the audits are analysed and reported to the Improvement Board and Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- The Council and agency partners must demonstrate that findings from file audits are used to improve social work practice and that there is compliance with management and case work practice standards

² Statutory Guidance: *'Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children'*
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00305-2010>

- All **management oversight** must be conducted in line with standards set out in ‘*Working Together*’ to ensure safe practice and decision-making on individual child protection cases. The standards, frequency of the oversight and challenge must be agreed by the Improvement Board who should also work with the LSCB. Regular qualitative feedback reports must be made available to the Improvement Board and LSCB which demonstrate continuing improvement in quality and effectiveness of management and decision making and that no case is closed prematurely leaving children and young people at risk of harm.
- The oversight of Social Work Unit caseload levels ensures an effective response to capacity issues as they arise. In doing so, managers must ensure that Social Work Units have workloads which are manageable and correspond with the different levels of experience and competencies of each unit.
- The Council commence a review of all section 47 enquiries over the past six months to ensure that actions from strategy discussions are clearly recorded, section 47 enquiries are undertaken appropriately and outcomes of these enquiries clearly recorded and signed off by a member of staff with the appropriate level of expertise.
- Conduct a review of the issues around the former temporary access team and resulting actions are put in place to ensure that the risk of reoccurrence is minimised.

Capacity and Capability

- Continue the **programme of induction, training, mentoring and continuous professional development** for all children’s social care staff including managers which has been undertaken as part of the transition to the unit model and systemic practice - to ensure staff have the skills to complete high quality and timely assessments. Attention must be paid to the eight standards for employers of social workers. The Council should report the impact of the training on improving outcomes for children to the Improvement Board.

Improving the effectiveness of partnership and governance

- Ensuring that the Council sets out a **statement of their vision and ambition** for improvement in their child protection arrangements (with a clear set of objectives and timescales) within one month of the commencement of the notice ensuring this statement is communicated to and implemented by staff and partners such that they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are held to account in delivering this vision and ambition of the Council, and overall improvement.
- Ensure that the Council and Council partners on the Improvement Board **agree objectives, actions and timescales to monitor progress** and assess impact

of improvement in the delivery of children's safeguarding services. The Improvement Board must ensure that these actions and timescales are communicated to all staff and the Council's partners who require this information so that they understand their roles and responsibilities in delivering these objectives and improvements. The Improvement Board must also ensure that plans are implemented to agreed timescales.

- **Ensure leadership, scrutiny and challenge is exercised** and impacts on the quality and effectiveness of safeguarding and looked after children services. Ensure these arrangements are sustained after improvements have been made by:
 - Promoting a culture of accountability that is developed with managers, staff and partners holding each other to account with action taken when required to challenge poor and unacceptable performance; and
 - Maintaining the effective assurance arrangements which are in place within the Council and across the partnership in line with DfE statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children Services.

Improvement Support

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

- Work with representatives of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) to formalise a package of sector support to address the issues set out in the inspections or raised through any sector peer review or challenge activities. The outcome of such activities is to help support delivery of improvement in outcomes for children, young people and families in Cambridgeshire and to increase the skills, knowledge and professional practice of staff.

Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice

We expect the Council to put in place an Improvement Board which shall be chaired by the Council's Chief Executive ("Board Chair") and which we expect will meet every 4 weeks initially. If in the future the Improvement Board wishes to vary the frequency of meetings this must first be agreed by the Department for Education. The Improvement Board should include in its membership representatives from the Council's partners. An official from the Department for Education will attend as a participant observer.

An Improvement Plan should be developed by the Improvement Board with Council partners to carry out the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection report of 19th October 2012 and those set out in this Improvement Notice. With members of the Improvement Board, the Council must agree a

dataset of performance indicators with targets and timescales. The Council must report to the Improvement Board on progress against those targets and timescales, and reporting must include analysis of performance trends that are failing to meet those targets and timescales. The Council should aim for all targets to be met by up to 12 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:

The Board Chair must provide to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families a written 6 monthly report including specific commentary against the targets set out in this Notice. The Board Chair must also provide an initial report 2 months after the commencement of this Notice. We also expect the Council to commission external validation of progress, such as additional peer challenge and externally commissioned reviews of social work practice led by the regional ADCS group and overseen by the CIB. These should be commissioned and carried out before the end of this Notice to inform decisions on next steps.

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 twelve months from the start of this Notice, or at the specific request of the Department. The Board Chair's report will be supplemented by a report on progress from the Leader of the Council. 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 may lead to:

The Secretary of State for Education exercising his powers of intervention under section 497A Education Act 1996 and direct the Council so as to secure the necessary and rapid improvements required in children's services.

Signed: **Date:**

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