

Improvement Notice

To: Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Council House
Manor Square
Solihull B91 3QB

This Improvement Notice is issued to Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (the Council) on 28 February 2022 following concerns around serious weaknesses in parts of the council's children's social care functions, and evidence of unassessed and unknown risk. The Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of Solihull (published on 21 February 2022) also includes the requirement for the Council to act on one multi-agency Area for Priority Action (APA) that we expect this improvement notice to address.

1. This Notice is given to address:
 - a) Serious concerns in respect of fragility of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and insufficient social worker capacity in the Council to deal effectively with presenting need.
 - b) Crisis management to reduce unallocated cases and situations of unassessed and unknown risk for a significant number of children in the Council's area;
and
 - c) The JTAI multi-agency Area for Priority Action and other areas for improvement identified by Ofsted.
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).

Adviser arrangements

3. As you are aware, the Secretary of State has appointed an Improvement Adviser, Gladys Rhodes White, to provide advice to the Department for Education (the Department) and the Council. The Council will work with the Improvement Adviser for a minimum of 12 months, and/or until such time that the Secretary of State is satisfied this is no longer required.

Improvement plan

4. The Council should implement an improvement plan that will deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement. The plan should include the areas identified in paragraph 1 (a to c), any recommendations made by the Improvement Adviser appointed by the Department, as well as Ofsted's findings in the JTAI report. Once the Council's improvement plan is drafted, it should be submitted to the Department.
5. To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:
 - the content of the improvement plan and a record of progress against it must be kept up to date;

- the Improvement Adviser will sit on the Council's Improving Children's Safeguarding Board (renamed to improving outcomes board) chaired by Penny Thompson, to ensure there is a clear and independent line of sight between the Council and the Department. The board should have full support from the Chief Executive and Council Leader, to oversee implementation of the improvement plan and report to the improvement board on progress against the objectives in the plan as well as commissioning updates from partners in order to do this;
- reports to the improvement board should include data, analysis and recommendations supported by evidence of the impact of improvements on the quality of practice and experience of children and families;
- the Council should highlight those objectives which are slow to progress and highlight where contributions need to be strengthened; and
- the views of frontline staff and of children and young people to be taken into consideration in the development of practice and standards.

Department for Education reviews

6. Officials or advisers from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the improvement plan at least every six months and more regularly where appropriate.
7. These reviews may cover but are not exclusive to: culture; performance; leadership, management and governance; workforce and management oversight; early help; and multi-agency arrangements.
8. The Improvement Adviser may require a diagnostic review or assessment of performance in a specific service area to be undertaken by the Council or other party agreed with the Department.
9. The Department will offer dedicated improvement support through its Sector Led Improvement Partner arrangements and may consider additional requests for support as part of the review process.
10. For any review or assessment, the Council must provide the persons conducting it with:
 - access to, and time with, staff and leaders;
 - accurate and up to date data on performance and quality;
 - facilities to carry out the reviews;
 - access to case files, minutes of meetings, supervision records or any other relevant information.

11. Prior to any reviews, the Council should provide its own assessment of improvement. This may reflect, but is not limited to:

- progress against the improvement plan objectives;
- staff surveys;
- staff supervision and the quality of feedback.

12. Taking account of the measures set out in this improvement notice, and the actions set out in the JTAI written statement of proposed action (due to be submitted by the Council on 30 May 2022) the Council should aim for final actions included in the improvement plan to be delivered by the agreed and appropriate timescales and no later than 31st December 2022.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

13. The Improvement Adviser will provide to the Department reports of progress or concern against the areas set out in this notice every six weeks. This report will also include progress against the improvement plan and any other such information relevant to the improvement journey. It is expected that the Improvement Adviser will be given full council support to fulfil these functions.

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

14. 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.

28 February 2022

Signed: Date:



Helen Brayley-Morris

A senior civil servant in the Department for Education