

Improvement Notice

To: Name **Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames**

Address: Guildhall, High Street, Kingston upon Thames, KT1 1EU

This Improvement 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 safeguarding and looked after children's services carried out by Ofsted dated 10 July 2012 ("the inspection report") which judged the overall effectiveness of the Council's safeguarding services to be 'inadequate'.

The following measures are needed for you to comply with this Improvement Notice:

The Council must take action to:

- (i) improve areas of weakness identified in the inspection report and ensure safeguarding and looked after children's services meet all legislative requirements.
- (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

- Improve the quality, and consistency of assessments by taking account of the safeguarding risks to the children and young people and ensuring their views are recorded, where this is appropriate. Take account of the analysis and views of the Council's partners and ensure all assessments are completed to the timescales set out in statutory guidance '*Working Together*'¹. Ensure that the assessment informs decision making and planning in line with statutory guidance.
- Develop and implement a system of risk assessment that will inform all Child Protection and Children in Need Plans to ensure consistent judgments are made about the levels of risk, following "the Conceptual

¹ 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>

Framework for Thinking about Risk Assessment and Case Management in Child Protective Service”². Ensuring that all staff engaged in safeguarding work are applying the ‘Conceptual Framework’ in their practice and that management information and the audit of the case files provide evidence that this is being done and the quality of social work practice is improving.

- Ensure the Council’s quality assurance systems are prepared in line with the Children’s Safeguarding Performance Information Framework and quality assurance processes referred to in ‘*Working Together*’. Ensure that quality assurance systems are implemented by all those in the Council’s Children’s Service. The system must include regular auditing arrangements of case files, with independent oversight and challenge to ensure the quality and timeliness of recording and compliance with recording in individual case records (as set out in ‘*Working Together*’) and that an assessment of risk is recorded. The frequency of the oversight and challenge must be agreed by the Safeguarding Improvement Board (“the Improvement Board”) who should also work with the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (“LSCB”). Regular reports of the audits must be made available to the Improvement Board and LSCB which demonstrate how the Council have addressed any findings of the audits and are improving the quality of social work practice.
- Improve the quality, delivery and management of child protection plans by ensuring that all child protection plans comply with ‘*Working Together*’ including ensuring that the plans set out the actions that must be taken and by whom and the outcomes to be achieved with timescales. Ensure that evidence of management oversight of case work and decision making is set out in detail on each case file and information arising from case audits confirms that this has been carried out satisfactorily.
- Ensure that all management oversight and decision-making on individual child protection cases is conducted in line with standards set out in ‘*Working Together*’ by the Council and agreed with the Improvement Board and evidence of that management oversight and decision making is set out in detail on each case file. Evidence from management information and information arising from case audits should reflect that this has been carried out satisfactorily.
- Ensure that performance management systems are reviewed, focusing on management oversight and the role of the Child Protection Conference Chair (“Chair”) and Independent Reviewing Officers (where the child is a looked after child) - and any points for action from the review are implemented. The impact of any changes must be monitored to ensure that they have resulted in improvements to the quality of social care practice.

² “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>

- Ensure that the procedures of the Independent Reviewing Officers are reviewed and any points of action are implemented. The impact of any changes to the procedures of the Independent Reviewing Officers must be monitored to ensure that any delay to the timescales set out in plans is prevented and that such plans are drawn up using a detailed and informed assessment and address the needs of the child.
- Develop and implement early intervention services with thresholds and referral mechanisms to step up to and down from specialist safeguarding services which will ensure that children, young people and their families receive support at the earliest opportunity. Ensure thresholds and criteria for assessment of the child³ and what to do when children and young people do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention but require targeted, multi agency, or early help, are communicated, understood and applied consistently across all partner agencies. Improvements would reflect a reduction in re-referral rates and positive feedback from partners and staff that children are receiving the help they need when they need it. Review and monitor the use of thresholds and criteria to ensure their effectiveness.

Capacity and Capability

- Implement a programme of induction, training, mentoring and continuous professional development for all children and families staff including managers to improve the quality of front line social work. Attention must be paid to the eight standards for employers of social workers⁴. In particular, ensure that this programme includes training for staff and managers on risk analysis. The Council must also work with the Council's partners to ensure that shared learning opportunities are utilised. The Council should report the impact of the training on improving outcomes for children to the Improvement Board.
- Monitor social worker workloads to ensure that responsibilities for tasks are understood by social workers, that evidence is provided to show that supervision and support meets social workers needs and that practitioners' workloads do not prevent them carrying out what they and their managers feel to be effective social work practice. Ensure that workloads and supervision take into account the experience of social workers', ensure attention is paid to case allocation and case management and that a workload management scheme is considered. Ensure that the Improvement Board receives management information to confirm that this is achieved and sustained.
- Ensure that the views of staff are considered in relation to their work and workplace using feedback mechanisms such as staff surveys and report the results to the Improvement Board. To support this, consideration

³ under section 17 of the Children Act 1989

⁴ http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/workforce/-/journal_content/56/10171/3511605/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE

should be given to the Children's Safeguarding Performance Information Framework (published 12 June 2012).⁵

Improving the effectiveness of partnership and governance

- 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 the Council sets out a statement of their vision and ambition for children's services. Ensuring this statement is communicated to and implemented by staff and Council partners.
- Establish a clear remit for the Improvement Board, Children's Trust and the LSCB with clear governance, lines of accountability and specific roles of each body in bringing about improvement.
- Put in place scrutiny arrangements to enable Members of the Council to scrutinise and challenge social care practice once the improvements have been made.
- Ensure the LSCB is able to scrutinise, monitor, challenge and provide strategic direction in relation to the quality of services provided by the Council and the outcomes for vulnerable children and meets all statutory requirements as set out in '*Working Together*'.

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 to formalise a package of sector support to address the issues set out in the inspection and any peer reviews. The package of support should include peer mentoring arrangements for the Lead Member for Children's Services to support them in leading the change required, and peer challenge and scrutiny at the Improvement Board. A wider package of support may be considered subject to the direction of the Improvement Board.

Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice

⁵<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/safeguardingchildren/protection/b00209694/perf-info>

We expect the Council to put in place an Improvement Board which shall have an independent Chair ("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 key partners and agencies. An official from the Department for Education will attend as a participant observer.

An Improvement Plan should be developed by the Improvement Board with partners and agencies to carry out the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection reports of 10 July 2012 and those set out in this Improvement Notice. With members of the Improvement Board, the Council must agree a dataset of performance targets with clear and realistic targets and timescales. The Council must report to the Improvement Board on progress against these, and reporting must include analysis of performance trends that are failing to meet the targets and timescales set. The Council should aim for all targets to be met by up to 18 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. 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.

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, twelve, and up to 18 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 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:**

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