

Improvement Notice

To: Name CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL (“the Council”)
Address 5 Portland Square, Carlisle, CA1 1PU

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 29th May 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 Ofsted inspection report and ensure safeguarding and looked after children’s services meet all legislative requirements and to comply with the statutory guidance insofar as consistent with any direction given to the Council by the Secretary of State under section 7A of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (LASSA); 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 partners”) must demonstrate evidence of improvement in outcomes by the following:

Quality and effectiveness of safeguarding practice

- Carry out assessments which meet the conditions of the directions made on 1 March 2011, 13 July 2011, 30 November 2011 and 22 March 2012 by the Secretary of State under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (as part of the Munro trial) until any further direction under that section is given by the Secretary of State. Assessments must be timely, proportionate to the needs of individual children and families and transparent. There must remain a clear distinction between the initial and core assessment. Each assessment must take account of the developmental needs of the child and consider the nature and level of both the risks and protective factors in a child’s life. Assessments must be underpinned by supervision and challenge and recorded. The Council will be required to have monthly contact with officials in the Department’s Safeguarding Group and provide the required feedback from the trial by

the end of August 2012. Officials must be notified immediately if a serious incident occurs.

- Ensure that all child protection plans comply with *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and *The Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*. Child protection plans must include the views of the child or young person and partner agencies and inform effective decision-making and planning.
- Ensure the Council's quality assurance framework meets the standards set out in statutory guidance. Ensure that the quality assurance framework is implemented by all those in the Council's Children's Service. The quality assurance framework 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 standards. The frequency of the oversight and challenge must be agreed by the Safeguarding Improvement Board. Regular reporting of the audits must be made available to the safeguarding Improvement Board demonstrating how the Council have addressed any findings of the audits in order to maintain and to continue to improve the quality of social work practice.
- Engage with children and young people to ensure that, in all cases, their views, experiences and needs are clearly recorded on their case files and used to inform their individual plans and the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. To support this attention should be paid to the information described within the Children's Safeguarding Performance Information Framework (published 12 June 2012).¹ The quality assurance framework must include provision to audit this requirement and report to the findings to the Board.
- Ensure that all management oversight and decision-making on individual child protection cases is conducted in line with standards set out by the Council (and agreed with the Safeguarding Improvement Board) and evidence of that management oversight and decision making is set out in detail on each case file. Ensure that evidence - from management information and information arising from case audits - confirms that this has been carried out satisfactorily;
- Work collaboratively with partner agencies to implement the preventative and early help strategy to increase the quantity, effectiveness and coordination of locally agreed assessment processes (e.g. CAF). Ensure the Improvement Board monitors the use and impact of these agreed assessment processes by partner agencies and take the necessary remedial action to ensure compliance.

¹<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/safeguardingchildren/protection/b00209694/perf-info>

- Ensure thresholds and criteria for assessment of the child² 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.

Improving the effectiveness of partnership and governance.

- Ensure that the partners of the Council on the Safeguarding Improvement Board work with the Council to agree objectives, actions and timescales which will provide the evidence to monitor progress and assess impact for improvement in the delivery of children’s safeguarding services. The Safeguarding Improvement Board should ensure that these actions and timescales are communicated to all staff and partners of the Council who have been identified by the Council as requiring this information so that they understand their roles and responsibilities in delivering these objectives and improvements. The Safeguarding Improvement Board must also ensure that plans are implemented to agreed timescales.
- Ensure leadership, scrutiny and challenge is exercised. As part of this, the Council must ensure elected members understand and deliver their corporate parent role and are properly trained and supported to undertake a scrutiny role of safeguarding services. Ensure these arrangements are sustained after improvements have been made.
- Establish a remit for the Safeguarding Improvement Board, the Children’s Trust, and the Local Safeguarding Children Board with responsibility for tasks set out, lines of accountability and specific roles of each body in ensuring improvement in Safeguarding Services are made and sustained.

Capacity and Capability

- Review and monitor caseloads, role and deployment of all child and family workers to ensure safeguarding risks are fully assessed, work is suitably allocated to workers with sufficient skills and experience, and work is managed. To also secure sufficient provision for induction and training necessary to support Child and Family workers in their role.
- 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. To support this, attention should be paid to the eight standards for employers of social workers³. The Council should also work with partner agencies to ensure

² under section 17 of the Children Act 1989

³http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/workforce/-/journal_content/56/10171/3511605/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE

that shared learning opportunities are utilised. The Council should report the impact the training has on improving outcomes for children to the Safeguarding Improvement Board.

- Ensure that the views of staff are considered in relation to their work and workplace using feedback mechanisms such as staff surveys the result of which should be reported to the Safeguarding Improvement Board. To support this consideration should be given to the information described within the Children's Safeguarding Performance Information Framework (published 12 June 2012).⁴

Improvement support measures

The Council must put in place a Safeguarding Improvement Board with an independent chair. The Board should meet once every 4 weeks initially, and include in its membership partner agencies. If the Board wishes to meet at 6 week intervals this must be agreed with the Department for Education. An official from the Department for Education will attend as a participant observer. The Council should provide the independent chair with such support as they need to carry out their role and that the Council should consider if further support and challenge might be sourced from the sector. This package of support could include peer mentoring and support for the Lead Member for Children's Services and senior managers to support them in leading the required change.

An improvement plan should be developed with partner agencies to address the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection report and those specifically highlighted in this Improvement Notice. The plan should be agreed with all partner agencies and the Safeguarding Improvement Board within one month of the issue of this Notice.

Taking account of the measures set out in this Notice:

The Council must report to the Safeguarding Improvement Board against the objectives, actions, timescales and impact indicators agreed by the Safeguarding Improvement Board. Reporting should include analysis of any objectives and actions which are not being achieved as planned, actions to address these, and revised timescales for improvement which should be agreed by the Safeguarding Improvement Board. The Council must meet all performance indicators and milestones by January 2014.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

Ministers must receive information on progress from the Chair of the Safeguarding Improvement Board in respect of the performance indicators and milestones set out in this Improvement Notice in October 2012, April 2013

⁴<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/safeguardingchildren/protection/b00209694/perf-info>

and October 2013. An initial review of progress against the Improvement Notice will be held with the Department for Education in January 2013, further reviews will be held in July 2013 with a final review in January 2014.

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

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.

Signed:

Date: