

Improvement Notice

To: Name KENT COUNTY COUNCIL ("The Council")

Address County Hall, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1XX

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 (published November 2010) which judged the overall effectiveness of Kent's safeguarding and services for looked after children to be 'inadequate'.

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

The Council must take action to:

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

The Council must demonstrate clear evidence of improvement in outcomes, by:

- Working with partners to develop preventative and early intervention services across the partnership;
- Preparing documentation, in agreement with Kent Local Safeguarding Children Board and Kent's Improvement Board, that sets out clear thresholds and criteria for access to children's social care which ensure that children at risk of harm receive intervention identified in the assessment of need in order to minimise risk and that such thresholds and criteria are implemented by all partners and agencies of the Council consistently across the County;
- Reducing the number of unallocated cases over 28 days to 200 or less, the number of initial assessments out of timescale to 200, and the number of core assessments out of timescale to 100 by August 2011 and thereafter minimising the number of each;

- Ensuring that the responsiveness and quality of assessments and child protection investigations improve, are clear and evidence based minimising risk and meet the standards set out in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010', ensuring that in all cases referrers are informed of the outcome of all their referrals;
- Ensuring that a written performance management and quality assurance framework is prepared and implemented by all staff with a view to driving up the quality of social care practice. The framework should include regular auditing arrangements of the quality of case files, the frequency of which should be agreed by the Improvement Board, and ensure that results of audits inform ongoing actions to improve the quality of frontline practice;
- Ensuring that children in need receive a timely service, minimising risk, by at least maintaining the percentage of initial and core assessments carried out on time as set out in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' at the levels prevailing when this Improvement Notice was issued;
- By ensuring that partner agencies have a clear understanding of children's social care thresholds and by ensuring that clear definitions of 'contact' and 'referral' are in place, increase the number of initial assessments of children in need per 10,000 population aged under 18 to be in line with statistical neighbour averages such that the percentage of referrals to children's social care going on to initial assessment increases from the 2009-10 baseline of 46% to 65% over the period January to March 2012 and an average of at least 65% over the period 2012-13;
- Implementing a programme of review and taking action as a result to reduce the percentage of child protection plans lasting two years or more to 6% over the period 2012-13 whilst ensuring that 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;
- Ensuring that there is sufficient capacity and capability within children's social care and actions are taken to improve the retention and stability of the workforce, in particular by reducing the vacancy rate of qualified social workers to 10%;
- Developing and implementing a comprehensive programme of induction, training, mentoring and continuous professional development for all social care staff, ensuring effective supervision of child protection social work practice is in place and ensuring that all management oversight and decision-making on individual cases is set out in writing on the case files, that these activities are reviewed and the results inform the ongoing development of practice;

- Developing and implementing a multi agency looked after children strategy which clarifies the respective responsibilities of all agencies and which supports improved outcomes for children in care;
- Working with the children in care council and others as the Council thinks is appropriate to ensure that all children in care are routinely made aware on a regular basis about how they can contribute to the development of the service or make complaints.
- Improving the quality of care plans, by improving the assessment of looked after children and ensuring that all plans contain health and education information and that Independent Reviewing Officers are used to assure quality and challenge casework decisions and unacceptable delays in meeting statutory requirements;
- Improving the percentage of children adopted to 11% by March 2012 and to 13% over the period 2012-13;
- Working with schools and others as appropriate to develop and implement a strategy to improve the educational achievement of children in care, such that the following quantitative targets are met:
 - Narrow the gap in attainment (as measured by the percentage of children achieving level 4 in English at the end of Key Stage 2) between children in care and their peers such that it is no more than 34percentage points by the end of the academic year 2011/12.
 - Narrow the gap in attainment (as measured by the percentage of children achieving level 4 in maths at the end of Key Stage 2) between children in care and their peers such that it is no more than 33 percentage points by the end of the academic year 2011/12.
 - Narrow the gap in attainment (as measured by the percentage of young people achieving 5+A*-C at GCSE including English and maths) between children in care and their peers such that it is no more than 36 percentage points by the end of the academic year 2011/12;
 - Reduce the percentage of children in care who miss 25 days or more days of schooling during the academic year to no more than 11%;
- Working with local health commissioners and providers to ensure that the percentage of children in care having health and dental checks increases to at least the England average of 85% by March 2012 and to at least maintain that over the period 2012-13.

We expect that the Council to put in place an Improvement Board which shall have an Independent Chair agreed with the Department for Education and which we expect will meet once a month and include in its membership key partners and agencies. An improvement programme will be established to carry out the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection report and those specifically highlighted in this Improvement Notice. This programme should be shared and agreed with key partners and agencies and the Improvement Board by the end of February 2011. 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.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

Quarterly reporting by the Chair of the Improvement Board to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education and the Leader of Kent County 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.

A formal review of progress will take place at least in April 2012 and a final review at the end of April 2013. Such reviews may result in further action being required.

Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment date 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: 8/3/11