

Improvement Notice

To: Name WILTSHIRE COUNCIL (“the Council”)
Address County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire,
BA14 8JN

This Improvement Notice is being issued due to poor performance in:

Safeguarding children and young people and adoption services

On the basis of evidence contained in:

1. The report of the inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services carried out by Ofsted and CQC dated April 2012 (“ the inspection report”) which judged the overall effectiveness of Wiltshire’s safeguarding services to be inadequate;
2. The adoption scorecard published by the Department of Education in May 2012 and
3. The Outcomes UK diagnostic assessment of Wiltshire’s adoption service dated May 2012.

The following measures are required for the Council to comply with this further Improvement Notice:

The Council must work with their partners to take action to:

1. improve the areas of weakness identified in the Ofsted inspection report having regard to the recommendations contained therein;
2. address the areas for consideration identified in the Outcomes UK diagnostic assessment to tackle delays in children being adopted and
3. put in place arrangements to sustain and build on the improvements secured.

In respect of 1 and 2 above with support from targeted sector-specialist support, the Council must demonstrate evidence of improvement in outcomes by the following:

Quality and effectiveness of social work practice

- Agree with the Improvement Board performance indicators and milestones to monitor progress in improving the delivery of safeguarding services. Reports on progress against the performance indicators and milestones should be discussed by the Improvement Board. The Improvement board should as a result of these discussions identify and take corrective action

taken to address any performance concerns.

- Take immediate action to clear the backlog of unallocated cases held in the Referral and Assessment Service (R&A). Implement a performance management system which will give R&A managers early warning of potential issues which will enable them to take action to ensure that a backlog of cases does not occur in the future and ensure that the team is adequately resourced. Take steps to assess what is driving the increase in referrals and contacts coming in to the R&A team and establish whether processes for 'stepping down' are being used appropriately.
- Improve the quality, and consistency of assessments, taking appropriate account of risk and recording the views of children and young people and the analysis of agencies identified by the Council as relevant partners ("partner agencies") whilst maintaining timeliness. The assessment will inform decision making and planning in line with statutory guidance;
- Improve the delivery and management of child protection plans so that expectations and outcomes with timescales are clearly set out. Action should be taken to address areas of practice where performance does not meet standards.
- Work with partner agencies to ensure that they participate in strategy discussions and risk assessment and contribute to all child protection and children in need plans.
- Improve the capability of child protection conference chairs to identify non-compliance with statutory guidance, unassessed risk, drift and lack of adequate contingency plans by providing revised guidance for chairs. Progress will be monitored by monthly child protection conference chair's performance reports.
- 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 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;
- Agree with the Improvement Board and the Wiltshire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) the frequency, scope and number of quality assurance audits. 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 WSCB in accordance with Ofsted 'Good practice by local safeguarding children boards'. Analysis should be used to inform action taken by the Council and partner agencies to bring about improvements in safeguarding social work practice and casework. 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. The impact of these areas will be evidenced through the continuous improvement of social work practice. The Council should also report on the impact of actions to the Improvement Board and WSCB.

Adoption Services

- Within one month of the date of this Improvement Notice, the Council must agree a plan with the Improvement Board which will improve the performance of the adoption service and which addresses the concerns set out in the Outcomes UK Diagnostic Report and the Council's Adoption Scorecard. The plan must set out milestone and performance indicators which will improve the performance of the adoption service and reduce delay. Progress against the performance indicator standards, targets and timescales must be reported at each meeting of the Improvement Board and action taken to address performance concerns and where standards, targets and timescales are not being met.
- The Council should reduce the time taken to place a child for adoption from the point that the child comes into the care of the local authority. In doing so the council should work towards meeting the timescales set out in The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations and Statutory Adoption Guidance revised in February 2011.

Partnership and governance

- Ensure that the agency partners on the Improvement Board work with the Council to agree objectives, actions, timescales and the evidence which will be used to monitor progress and assess impact for improvement in the delivery of children's safeguarding services. The Board should ensure that these are communicated to all social work staff and agency partners so that they understand their roles and responsibilities in delivering these objectives and improvements. The Improvement Board should also ensure that safeguarding and adoption plans are implemented to agreed timescales;
- Put in place scrutiny arrangements to enable members of the Council to scrutinise and challenge social care practice once the necessary improvements have been made.

Capacity and capability

- Implement a programme of induction, training, mentoring and continuous professional development for all social care 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 workers¹. The Council should also work with agency partners to ensure that shared learning opportunities are exploited. The Council should report the impact the work has on improving outcomes for children to the Improvement board;

¹http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/workforce/-/journal_content/56/10171/3511605/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE

- Monitor social worker workloads to ensure that responsibilities for tasks are defined and are understood by social workers, that evidence is provided that social workers report that supervision and support meets their 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 the social worker, ensure attention is paid to case allocation and case management and that a workload management scheme is used. Ensure that the Improvement Board receives management information to confirm that this is achieved and sustained;
- Ensure management oversight of the social worker's caseload alongside decision making on individual cases through the use of reflective supervision. The results of the supervision should be used to identify strengths and areas for development which will then be used to bring about improvements in the quality of social work practice;
- 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 Improvement Board. To support this consideration should be given to the information set out in the Children's Safeguarding Performance Information Framework (published 12 June 2012)²

Support measures

We expect the Council to put in place an Improvement Board which shall have an independent chair and which we expect will continue to meet once every 6 weeks and include in its membership partner agencies. An official from the Department for Education will attend as an observer. 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 if further support and challenge might be sourced from the sector. The package of support must include peer mentoring and support for the Lead Member for Children's Services, the Portfolio Holder for Children's Service, the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel and senior managers to support them in leading the required change.

Improvement plans should be developed with partner agencies to carry out the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection report and those specifically highlighted in this Improvement Notice. The plans 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 against the objectives, actions, timescales and impact indicators agreed by the Improvement Board. Reporting should include analysis

²<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/safeguardingchildren/protection/b00209694/perf-info>

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 Improvement Board. The Council should aim for all performance indicators and milestones to be met by **December 2013**.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

Ministers should receive information on progress from the Chair of the Improvement Board in respect of the performance indicators and milestones set out in this Improvement Notice in September 2012, March 2013 and September 2013. An initial review of progress against the Improvement Notice will be held The Department for Education in December 2012, further reviews will be held in June 2013 with a final review in December 2013

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

Should the Council be unwilling or unable to comply with this further 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: