



Department  
for Education

Sanctuary Buildings  
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London  
SW1P 3BT

Ms Lucy Butler  
Executive Director Children  
Young People and Learning  
West Sussex County Council  
County Hall  
Chichester  
PO19 1RQ

18<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Dear Ms Butler

## **WEST SUSSEX COUNCIL STATUTORY DIRECTION AND TRUST SET-UP EXTENSION REQUEST**

I am writing to you in relation to the Statutory Direction issued to West Sussex County Council on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education.

We are aware that local authorities are facing unprecedented pressures arising from the Covid 19 crisis in addition to carrying out normal children's social work activity to ensure children are safe and protected from harm. We know you and your teams will be doing everything you can to keep children safe during this unprecedented time.

As part of these efforts, it is critical that local authorities continue their focus on improving services. The pressures created by Covid-19 are a reminder of how important it is that we tackle longer-standing challenges in children's social care services, to ensure that we can deliver effective and efficient services that meet the needs of children and families.

As such, we have agreed that a three-month delay to the implementation and setting up of the Trust be granted. At that point, mid-August, I have asked the Commissioner, John Coughlan, to provide advice on the degree to which implementation plans can resume.

It is imperative that we use this date as our next key decision making milestone and that this be led by the Commissioner's next quarterly review, which is to include further detail on progress made against the recommendations in his original report. It has also been agreed that both the Memorandum of Understanding and Business Case for Trust set-up costs are to be agreed, *in principle*, in anticipation for when political engagement with the Council's Cabinet can hopefully begin again from Autumn onwards.

In addition, we are working closely with local authorities where there is a Statutory Direction in place to understand the impact of Covid-19 and support them in

implementing robust response plans. The Statutory Direction specifies certain requirements which we recognise may be a challenge for you to meet in the current climate. In these exceptional circumstances we are confirming the following flexibilities to enable you to deliver your responsibilities at this challenging time while continuing your improvement journey:

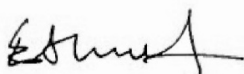
- a) Improvement boards to be held virtually with an expectation that all usual board members or their representatives will attend, including statutory partners and education leads occurring every 6 weeks at the very least.
- b) Improvement boards can be re-focussed to support management of Covid-19 and partnership response to key issues.
- c) Improvement plans to be monitored and updated with delivery risks due to Covid-19 clearly identified.
- d) Commissioner and Adviser roles to encompass LAs response and management of Covid-19 and therefore reporting to update on progress of both improvement work and Covid-19 response.

While offering these flexibilities, our focus continues to be to ensure that children are safe and protected from harm and we expect that the local authority will maintain momentum in progressing the improvement objectives outlined in the Statutory Direction. If we become concerned about progress, we will take quick action to address this.

Please note that these are temporary measures for the duration of the Covid-19 crisis and there is an expectation that once you have returned to business as usual, you will return to the priorities and timeframes specified in your Statutory Direction. As ever, please continue to work closely with your Caselead and Improvement partners, Hampshire County Council, as you make progress and to keep plans under review.

I am copying this letter to Becky Shaw, Chief Executive; Councillor Paul Marshall, Leader of the Council; Jacquie Russell, Lead Member for Children and Young People; John Coughlan, Commissioner and Chief Executive for Hampshire County Council; and Steve Crocker, Director of Children's Services for Hampshire County Council. The letter will be published on the .Gov webpage - we will confirm with you when this has been done.

Yours sincerely



**Emily Whitehead**  
**Deputy Director, Children's Social Care, Improvement and Interventions**